

HARRY LEON WILSON AS A HUMORIST

by

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## Preface

In choosing as the subject for this thesis the study of Wilson as a humorist, I was attracted to Wilson largely because of his verbal peculiarities. As a student of foreign languages, I have always been extremely interested in any striking use of the English language, so naturally this phase of Wilson appealed to me. When I began to study his works, however, I soon realized that the verbal phase, though most important, is only one of several features which must be treated in a study of Wilson. This study has been intensely interesting to me, and although it has proved much more complex and laborious than I at first expected, I have enjoyed it from beginning to end. I hope that I have not become tiresome with my quotations from Wilson's works. It was often hard to know what to exclude. I also hope that this feeble attempt to evaluate the works of Harry Leon Wilson may acquaint some people with him who do not know him, and inspire others to read more of his books.

I wish to express my sincere appreciation to the Librarians of the University of Kansas for their helpfulness at all times, and especially to the City Library of Lawrence, from which I secured several of Wilson's novels. The Libraries of Winfield, Kansas,

and Eldorado, Kansas, also furnished several novels which were unobtainable elsewhere. To my roommates, friends, and relatives who have patiently watched and encouraged me through this work, and have endured the continued scattering of cards and material, I wish to express deep appreciation. Most of all, to Dr. Josephine Burnham, Professor of English in the University of Kansas, who has been my untiring guide and inspiration during this work, and has given freely and willingly her time and aid, I wish to express my heartfelt thanks and appreciation. To her I owe more than to anyone else.

*Helen Baker.*

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HARRY LEON WILSON

AS A HUMORIST

## Chapter I

### Introduction

Sterne has said, "I am persuaded that every time a man smiles--but much more so when he laughs--it adds something to this fragment of life." If smiles and happiness are of so much value in this old world, then certainly a study of one of our leading humorists of today will be worthwhile. Among our present-day authors Harry Leon Wilson has attracted much notice as a writer of this type, and it has seemed to me that the humor of Wilson's novels might afford material for a valuable and interesting study.

At the beginning of this work, I planned to make a study of all of Wilson's novels. But as there are five of them which I have been unable to secure, I have based my discussion on the following works: The Spenders (1902), The Lions of the Lord (1903), The Boss of Little Arcady (1905), Bunker Bean (1912), The Man from Home (1915), Ruggles of Red Cap (1915), Somewhere in Red Cap (1916), The Wrong Twin (1921), Oh, Doctor! (1923), Merton of the Movies (1923), Professor How Could You! (1925), Cousin Jane (1926), and Lone Tree (1929).<sup>1</sup> I have not included his plays, which he wrote in col-

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<sup>1</sup>. Besides the books here studied, according to Who's Who in America for 1930, he has written the following: Zig-zag Tales (1896), The Seekers (1904), Ewing's Lady (1907), Ma Pettengill (1919), and So This is Golf (1923).

laboration with Booth Tarkington.

I was not able to find any detailed accounts of Wilson's life. He was born in Oregon, Illinois, May 1, 1867. In the Bookman for August, 1925, is given the account of an interview with Mr. Wilson by Myla Jo Closser. I am quoting parts from this because we can get from it Mr. Wilson's own story of his method of gathering material, and of his creation of characters. After we know his ideas about writing, and his likes and dislikes, we can appreciate his work much better.

It was a good many years since I had last seen Harry Leon Wilson; not since a memorable phrase from one of his early books-- "Don't take life warily"--had worked a drastic change upon my own fortunes. It was of this I was thinking when I came to interview him upon the methods, the minutia of his craft, whereby he brings the children of his fancy--Ruggles, Bunker Bean, Merton, Rufus Billop, and his latest, Professor Coplestone of Professor How Could You!--to a public which roars over and adores them. . . .

There was no typist in the room. "I tried dictating once", Mr. Wilson told me, "but I found I was laboriously choosing words I knew the typist could spell and I decided this would affect my style unfavorably. . . ."

"Don't you take time off to go in search of local color?"

"Not time off. I don't go. I am always in search of it. All the while I make notes on scraps of paper, jotting down ideas, phrases, or mere words which suggest ideas and phrases. By the time I begin a novel I have several hundred of these disconnected scraps. They drive me crazy but I must have them."

"And from these you make a skeleton

of your story?"

"No, I don't make an outline in writing, but I have one very definitely in mind. This I change many times before beginning composition. But having decided on a plan, I do not change, and I never begin without knowing how I am going to end. The end conditions the beginning. Sometimes I start a thing by hand, fearing I may not be able to do it at all. But two pages are enough."

"Do you work your stuff over?"

"Not as I go. I finish first and let the beginning get cold. Then rewrite. . . ."

"And where do you get your ideas for stories, Mr. Wilson? Yours are always so fresh--original and unsteretyped."

"The germs for them usually come from real life. Though once I found a whole novel in a dozen-line newspaper paragraph. But I often find real life too incredible to use unaltered. Only the fiction artist can believe real life as it is. If he draws it too truly--unless he is a mere photographer of the commonplace--he is told he overdraws, exaggerates.

"I do not largely use personal experience, for my own is not so rich. I listen, rather. And the emotion, without which I think no one can write, comes to me from the experience of others rather than from my own.

"However, I rarely draw characters from life. It entertains me more to make mine up. I construct them entirely from imagination."

"And do they every defy you and act as you have not intended, as Barrie says the persons of his stories do?"

"I have vainly longed for that delightful experience." And this time it was no half smile but a whole one. . . .

Wilson has carved a smiling destiny for so many irresistibly droll yet half pathetic figures that I inquired whether he preferred happy endings or merely tolerated them. He answered that he had no prejudice one way or

the other; but that he regarded life as a series of happy endings "if you pick the right spots".

"You give me, on the whole, the impression that you think rather well of life", was my comment as I was leaving.

"Anyone is lucky to have got in at all on such a preposterous adventure," were his last words.<sup>1</sup>

We are chiefly interested in Wilson's humor, but we can appreciate it more if we understand his ability to depict a wide variety of American scenes. From the interview given above, we can easily see how he secures this effect. To one constantly on the alert, as he is, for ideas, and ready to jot down all suggestions that come, a great many varied experiences are presented each day. It is from these that he draws the illustrations for his books.

Among his descriptions are the gypsy camp on the outskirts of Newbern, which is a place of vast interest to the younger generation; a trainload of boys on their way to the War; a realistic description of a baseball game; spring on the ranch; a perfect picture of the small-town store; an inside glimpse of a motion-picture studio in California; the inside of a copper mine; a lovely description of the western country; the Stock Exchange in New York; the humorous presentation of a medicine-show; the Free Auto Camp Grounds where Professor Coplestone spends a part of his time; and

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1. The Bookman, August, 1925.

the Carnival which he later joins. Then there is the amusing description by Ruggles, the Englishman, of the "American wilderness", and the very humorous description of camping-out in America, in which he dwells upon the absence of central heating, electricity for his smoothing-iron, and conveniences of all sorts.

The Lions of the Lord presents an entirely different type of scenes, such as the Winter Quarters of the Mormons, a Mormon burial out on the prairie, and the Mormons on the march.

Another well-known feature of Wilson is his creation of distinctive American characters. Perhaps we can better appreciate the variety if we make a list of a few of the more outstanding types. Professor Copplestone, the absent-minded professor, is perhaps one of Wilson's best-known characters, and one of his most humorous ones. Professor Hemingway, another college professor, is of a very different type, but just as real. In the same story we find Sooner Jackson, the exhibitor of medicine shows. Another, and one of the most vividly portrayed of Wilson's characters, is Bertrand Meigs, the Demon Alumnus. Then there are the Hamburger Queen, with whom Professor Copplestone becomes deeply infatuated, Mrs. Belknap-Jackson, and the Mixer. Other outstanding characters in different books are Rufus Billop, the imaginary invalid, Mr. Gashwiler of the country store, and Miss Vrain of the girls' boarding school.

Our main concern, however, is with Wilson as

a humorist; therefore we must agree upon the meaning of the term humor. The New English Dictionary gives several different appropriate meanings. But for our use we find the following:

Humor: - (a) That quality of action, speech, or writing, which excites amusement, oddity, jocularity, facetiousness, comicality, fun.

(b) The faculty of perceiving what is ludicrous or amusing, or of expressing it in speech, writing, or other composition; jocose imagination or treatment of a subject.

Meredith, in An Essay on Comedy, has made several comments which should be interesting to us in connection with our study of Wilson and his humor.

To touch and kindle the mind through laughter, demands more than sprightliness, a most subtle delicacy . . . (page 8)

Comedy is the fountain of sound sense; not the less perfectly sound on account of the sparkle. . . . (page 28)

There will never be civilization where comedy is not possible. (page 60)

The following remark of Meredith, I feel, is the keynote to Wilson's great success as a humorist.

To love Comedy you must know the real world, and know men and women well enough not to expect too much of them, though you may still hope for good. (page 46)

Wilson certainly does know men and women in every walk of life. Further, Meredith says:

You may estimate your capacity for Comic perception by being able to detect the ridicule of them you love, without loving them less; and more by being able to see yourself somewhat ridiculous in dear eyes, and accepting the correcting their image of you proposes. . . . (page 78)

If you detect the ridicule, and your kindness is chilled by it, you are slipping into the grasp of Satire.

If you laugh all round the ridiculous person, tumble him, roll him about, deal him a smack, and drop a tear on him, own his likeness to you and yours and to your neighbors, spare him as little as you shun, pity him as much as you expose, it is a spirit of Humour that is moving you. (page 79)

Wilson's work is by no means without the serious element, and in many places we find pathos, and some tragedy interwoven with the humor. There is more of this element in The Lions of the Lord than in any of his other books. In many cases the humor itself in this story has at the same time a strain of the pathetic. We find much of this also in The Spenders, The Man from Home, The Wrong Twin, and The Boss of Little Arcady. All of his books have some seriousness. This brings us to two other comments of Meredith which I wish to quote:

The stroke of the great humorist is world-wide, with lights of Tragedy in his laughter. . . . (page 84)

The test of true Comedy is that it shall awaken thoughtful laughter. (page 88)

In his 18th Century Humorists Thackeray makes a statement which is very applicable to Wilson. He says:

Upon all the actions of man, the most trifling and the most solemn, the humorist takes upon himself to comment. (page 135)

It seems to me, after considering these statements, that Wilson is not a common writer of the lower class, but is a humorist truly worthy of our study. After carefully reading Wilson's novels, I decided to study his humor under the three main divisions: Humor in Characterization; Humor in Situation; and Verbal Sources of Humor.

I was quite pleasantly surprised when, some time later, I read Henri Bergson's essay on Laughter, and discovered that he had made three main divisions of humor, and called them: "The Comic in Situations"; "The Comic in Words"; and "The Comic in Character".

Bergson says:

The comic does not exist outside the pale of what is strictly human. A landscape may be beautiful, charming and sublime, or insignificant and ugly; it will never be laughable. You may laugh at an animal, but only because you have detected in it some human attitude or expression. You may laugh at a hat, but what you are making fun of, in this case, is not the piece of felt or straw, but the shape that men have given it,--the human caprice whose mould it has assumed.  
(page 3)

I mentioned above Wilson's keen knowledge of human nature, and his portrayal of natural American types. Bergson makes one more comment which we should consider with relation to this:

When a certain comic effect has its origin in a certain cause, the more natural we regard the cause to be, the more comic shall we find the effect. (page 12)

Throughout this study I shall quote often from Bergson, because his essay is so very closely related to our subject. In the study of Wilson, there will necessarily be some overlapping of material, for in many cases the same incident illustrates different phases of humor.

## Chapter II

### Humor in Characterization

Perhaps the quality for which Wilson is best-known to the average reader is his skill in creating unusual and humorous characters. One who is at all familiar with his works feels personally acquainted with Professor Copplestone, Ruggles, Bunker Bean, and Merton Gill, the would-be movie star. But others are just as humorous and delightful.

We say that his characters are unusual, because by few writers do we find such a variety of types portrayed. But the most attractive feature about Wilson's characters is their naturalness. And this, I think, can be attributed to his habit of very carefully observing and studying human nature. It is really this perfect naturalness which makes his characters comic. Bergson has given some very suggestive comments on this. He says:

It is comic to wander out of one's own self. It is comic to fall into a ready-made category. And what is most comic of all is to become a category oneself into which others will fall, as into a ready-made frame; it is to crystallize into a stock character.

Thus, to depict characters, that is to say, general types, is the object of high class comedy. (page 149)

Bergson also says, in his chapter on "The Comic in Character":

Comedy can only begin at the point where our neighbor's personality ceases to affect us. It begins, in fact, with what might be called a growing callousness to social life. Any individual is comic who automatically goes his own way without troubling himself about getting into touch with the rest of his fellow-beings . . . . (page 134)

Comedy depicts characters we have already come across and shall meet with again. It takes note of similarities. It aims at placing types before our eyes. It even creates new types, if necessary. (page 163)

It is hard to know just how far we may go in describing humor of characterization, without wandering into another territory. And for our answer to this problem we turn again to the same chapter of Bergson.

Instead of concentrating our attention on actions, comedy directs itself rather to gestures. By gestures we here mean the attitudes, the movements and even the language by which a mental state expresses itself outwardly without any aim or profit, from no other cause than a kind of inner itching. Gesture, thus defined, is profoundly different from action. Action is intentional or, at any rate, conscious; gesture slips out unawares, it is automatic. In action, the entire person is engaged; in gesture, an isolated part of the person is expressed, unknown to, or at least apart from, the whole of the personality. . . . (page 143)

However unconscious one may be of what he says or does, he cannot be comical unless there be some aspect of his person of which he is unaware, one side of his nature which he overlooks; on that account alone does he make us laugh. Profoundly comic sayings are those artless ones in which some vice reveals itself in all its nakedness. (pages 146-147)

In explaining just what a comic character is, and why we enjoy him, Bergson says:

The comic character is often one with whom, to begin with, our mind, or rather our body, sympathizes. By this is meant that we put ourselves for a very short time in his place, adopt his gestures, words and actions, and, if amused by anything laughable in him, we invite him, in imagination, to share his amusement with us. (pages 194-195)

When we attempt to analyze the different methods by which Wilson portrays character, we find a great many. I have chosen what I consider a few of the most important ones. One method which he uses is that of vivid description of a person, sometimes in his own words, and sometimes by other characters. At times Wilson merely describes the character, and again he gives the picture indirectly, by recounting thoughts or actions.

The description of Ma Pettingill, or the "Mixer", as given by Ruggles is almost as important in revealing his character as hers.

We rushed to the door, and in the distance, riding down upon us at terrific speed, I indeed beheld the Mixer. A moment later she reined in her horse before us and hoarsely rumbled her greetings. . . . Now she appeared in a startling tenue of khaki riding-breeches and flannel shirt, with one of the wide-brimmed cow-person hats. Even at the moment of greeting her I could not but reflect how shocked our dear Queen would be at the sight of this riding habit. . . .

Cousin Egbert took her horse and she entered the hut, where to my utter amazement she at once did a feminine thing. Though from her garb one at a little distance might

have thought her a man, a portly, florid, carelessly attired man, she made at once for the wrinkled mirror where, after anxiously scanning her burned face for an instant, she produced powder and puff from a pocket of her shirt and daintily powdered her generous blob of a nose. Having achieved this to her apparent satisfaction, she unrolled a bundle she had carried at her saddle and donned a riding skirt, buttoning it about the waist and smoothing down its folds--before I could retire.  
(Ruggles of Red Gap, pages 199-200)

Unusually good is Professor Copplestone's description of Bertrand Meigs, the well-known demon alumnus.

Down the winding walk that passed before my bench sauntered a terrifying figure all too well known to me; none other than Bertrand Meigs, long since detested as Fairwater's demon alumnus. Even at a considerable distance the slight wiry frame, the loudish suit of checks, the straw hat ribboned with the colors of his college club, the rattan stick--made his identity all too certain. He is an irresponsible person of youngish--far too young--middle age; indeed I believe his was the class of '04; yet each year at commencement time he infests the campus in a striped blazer, and by sheer force of character becomes a leader of all activities. If nothing better offers he will assemble any random group of students and insist with a sort of grim frivolity upon leading them in the college yell. His energy is tireless and he presumes outrageously upon his seniority. I have known him approach our president while in the ceremonial robes of his office, slap him rudely on the back and proffer him a cigar from one of his waistcoat pockets, either of which seems to spout cigars like a fountain. He makes himself equally familiar with other members of the faculty. Me, for example, he has for years addressed as Coppie, even in mixed company, yet of his actual college time I have but the faintest recollection, being positive only that he never majored in history. He is, in short, a busybody, an annual pest, as Fergus Jessup has said. (Professor How Could You! page 76)

The two twins, Merle and Wilbur, in The Wrong Twin, were exact opposites in every way, and especially in disposition. Wilson gives a splendid picture of poor little Wilbur sitting in church.

Thus began an hour of acute mental distress for the Wilbur twin. He sat tightly between Mrs. Penniman and the judge. There was no free movement possible. He couldn't even juggle one foot backward and forward without correction. The nervous energy thus suppressed rushed to all the surface of his body and made his skin tingle maddeningly. He felt each hair on his head as it broke away from the confining soap. Something was inside his collar, and he couldn't reach for it; there was a poignant itching between his shoulder blades, and this could receive no proper treatment. He boiled with dumb, helpless rage, having to fight this wicked unrest. He never doubted its wickedness, and considered himself forever shut out from those rewards that would fall to the righteous who loved church and could sit still there without jigging or writhing or twisting or scratching. (page 80)

Another time Wilson draws a striking contrast between Merle and Wilbur.

He [Wilbur] must dress in his own Sunday clothes, wash his hands with due care--they would be doubtfully inspected by Winona--and put soap on his hair to make it lie down. Merle's hair would lie politely as combed, but his own hair owned no master but soap. Lacking this, it stood out and up in wicked disorder--like the hair of a rowdy, Winona said. (page 77)

Bunker Bean presents the picture of a hard headed, dried-up old business man in Metzeger.

There remained old Metzeger who worked silently all day over a set of giant ledgers, interminably beautifying their pages with his meticulous figures. True, Bean had once heard Bulger fail interestingly to borrow five dollars of Metzeger until Saturday noon, but a flash of true Napoleonic genius now

enabled him to see precisely why Bulger had not succeeded. Metzger lived for numerals, for columned digits alone. He carried thousands of them in his head and apparently little else. He could tell to the fraction of a cent what Union Pacific had opened at on any day you chose to name. He had a passion for odd amounts. A flat million as a sum interested him far less than one like \$107.69 $\frac{3}{4}$ . He could remember it longer. It was necessary then to appeal to the poetry in the man. (pages 69-70)

Bunker Bean's impression of Mrs. Breede, the wife of his employer, is somewhat humorous.

Mrs. Breede, a member of one of the very oldest families in Omaha, he learned, terrified him exceedingly. She was an advanced dresser--he had to admit that--but she was no longer beautiful. She was a plucked rose that had been too long kept; the petals were rusting, crumpling at the edges. He wondered if Breede had ever wished to be wrecked on a desert island with her. She surveyed Bean through a glass-and-gold weapon with a long handle, and on the two subsequent occasions when she addressed him called him Mr. Brown. Once meeting him in the hall, she seemed to believe that he had been sent to fix the telephone. (page 135)

We find another very good character portrayal in the description of Professor Balthasar, the clairvoyant.

The professor was a mere sketch of a man, random, rakish, with head aslant and shifty eyes forever dropping away from a questioner's face. He abounded in inhuman angles and impossible lines. It seemed he must have been rather dashing done in the first place, then half obliterated and badly mended with fumbling, indecisive touches. His restless hands unceasingly wrung each other as if he had that moment made his own acquaintance and was trying to infuse a false geniality into the meeting.

When he spoke he had a trick of opening

his mouth for a word and holding it so, a not overclean forefinger poised above an outheld palm. It seemed to the listener that the word when it came would mean much. His white moustache alone had a well-finished look, curving jauntily upward. (Bunker Bean, pages 92-93)

Wilson is unusually successful in picturing the imaginary invalid. We have several pictures of Rufus Billop which are good.

At the age of seven, life for little Rufus had become a hazardous series of recoveries--partial recoveries, his mother insisted. He knew the medicine cabinet to the last vial, and could be trusted to measure out his own tonic drops or his tincture of iron or the stuff to build up his bones. The scent of drugs was never long from his nostrils, nor from his mind the fear that if he stood by an open window he would catch something new. (Oh, Doctor!, page 10)

Rufus had all through life an odd dread of very common things.

He did not precisely fear telephones, but their mechanism and their preliminary rituals distressed him. He used one only when he could not avoid it and uttered as few painfully self-conscious words as would serve. In spite of abundant proofs to the contrary, he had never believed that people could really hear him. There was trickery in it. He thought rapidly now. He dreaded the ordeal of calling for a number, the doubt if he would be heard; dreaded the remote yet weirdly near sound of a strange voice. (pages 265-266)

In The Boss of Little Arcady we find a few short, but very expressive passages of character portrayal. The following describes two characters never mentioned again, but we feel after reading this one sentence, that we know them.

It proved to be a season of unwonted severity, every weather expert in town, from Uncle William McCormick, who had kept a diary record for thirty years, to Grandma Steck, who had foretold its coming from a goose-bone, agreeing that the cold was most unusual. (page 239)

Closely akin to characterization through humorous description is the method of characterization through speech more or less unconsciously humorous.

Mrs. Potts, when she came to her home in Little Arcady, not only tried to change the entire community and reform all its inhabitants, but also exhibited a feeling that she and her young son were superior to all others. The following conversation shows a little of the character of both.

"My son", interrupted his mother, "kindly tell the gentlemen what should be your aim in life."

"To strive to improve my natural gifts by reading and conversation," answered Roscoe in one swift breath. (The Boss of Little Arcady, page 127)

A letter from Aunt Clara to Bunker Bean contains a very characteristic passage, in which we see her carefree nature, and lack of true sentiment.

"Dear Bunker" (it began), "my own dear husband passed to his final rest last Thursday at 5 P. M. He was cheerful to the last and did not seem to suffer much. The funeral was on Saturday and was very beautiful and impressive. I did not notify you at the time as I was afraid the shock would affect you injuriously and that you might be tempted to make the long trip here to be with me. Now that you know it is all over, you can take it peacefully, as I am already doing. The life-insurance people were very nice about it and paid the claim promptly. I enclose the money which wipes out all but---"(page 101)

Mrs. Bines, in The Spenders, by her literalness and her Western ignorance of the east, creates many humorous situations, and is a source of much anxiety to her daughter, Psyche.

"You'll soon learn all those things, ma," said her daughter--"and not to talk to the waiters, and everything like that. She always asks them how much they earn, and if they have a family, and how many children, and if any of them are sick, you know," she explained to Percival. . . .

"Only there's one thing," said his sister to Percival, when later they were alone, "we must be careful about ma; she will persist in making such dreadful breaks, in spite of everything I can do. In San Francisco last June, just before we went to Steaming Springs, there was one hot day, and of course everybody was complaining. Mrs. Beale remarked that it wasn't the heat that bothered us so, but the humidity. It was so damp, you know. Ma spoke right up so everybody could hear her, and said, "Yes; isn't the humidity dreadful? Why, it's just running off me from every pore!" (page 133)

Rufus Billop, the imaginary invalid, utters some very amusing speeches. The following is typical of him.

Sometimes he would report, "I feel as if there was an iron band around my head;" or, more strikingly, "I feel as if my brains were being stirred around with a stick;" "I don't breathe clear;" "After I walk a few steps I have a pain in my temples;" "Last night I felt the food in my chest;" "I have the same kind of noise in my chest that I have in my ear;" "There's a little pain in my heel whenever I press it." (Oh, Doctor!, page 27)

We have in Mrs. Penniman one who is prone to exaggerate. As she describes the episode in the graveyard,

when the Cowan twins and Patricia Whipple agree to change clothes, and do it very peacefully, she becomes very much excited.

"And Ed Seaver had been to the barber shop to have his hair cut--he always gets it cut the fifteenth of each month--well, he found out all about it from Don Paley, that they'd had to send for to come to the Whipple New Place to cut it neatly off after the way it had been sawed off rough, and she told me word for word. Well, it's unbelievable, and everyone saying something ought to be done about it--you just never would be able to guess!" . . .

"Well," resumed Mrs. Penniman, feeling that the last value had been extracted from mere suspense; "anyway, it seems that this morning poor little Patricia Whipple was going by the old graveyard, and the twins jumped out and knocked her down and dragged her in there away from the road and simply tore every stitch of clothes off her back and made her dress up in Wilbur's clothes --" . . .

"And the Lord only knows what the little fiends would have done next, but Juliana Whipple happened to be passing, and heard the poor child's screams and took her away from them." (The Wrong Twin, page 66)

Dave Cowan, the father of the twins, is a happy-go-lucky man, with no definite goal in life, and never any desire for real work. We see him as he really is in the following speech to Wilbur.

"Now you take barbering," said Dave. "There's a good loose trade. A barber never has to look for work; he can go into any new town and always find his job. I don't know but what I'd just as soon be a barber as a printer. Some ways I might like it better. . . . It's a cleaner trade than

typesetting and fussing around a small-town print shop." . . .

"New York, Boston, Buffalo, Chicago, Omaha, Kansas City, Denver, San Antone," murmured Dave, and there was unction in his tone as he recited these advantages of a loose trade--"any place you like the looks of, or places you've read about that sound good--just going along with your little kit of razors, and not having to small-town it except when you want a bit of quiet." (The Wrong Twin, pages 95-96)

Perhaps one of the most amusing bits of character portrayal through the ordinary speech of the individual is the following narrative by Professor Copplestone. He is hiding in the Leffingwell house, while the family is away on a vacation, and looking out, sees a man carrying a sign on his shoulders. He strongly censures the man for doing the very same type of thing which he himself has done.

I breathed more freely now, since it was plain my own presence had not drawn him here, but I was vexed at the fellow's effrontery. Having observed in his progress of our avenue that the house was for the time tenantless, he entered the rear yard as coolly as if the place were his own and made himself at home. . . . He was altogether one of those wretches who would not only prove false to their trust but who, seeing the chance, would enter another's premises. (Professor How Could You!, page 36)

Another of Wilson's outstanding creations is Ruggles, the Englishman who comes over to America. Throughout all his speeches we find a subtle vein of humor unsurpassed in any of Wilson's novels. Ruggles is so very earnest and whole-hearted in all his statements, and he

is usually so very badly mistaken in his conclusions, that he is a constant source of amusement to the reader. He is very extravagant in his use of language, as the following passage will show.

I was as one floating in fancied security down the calm river above their famous Niagara Falls--to be presently dashed without warning over the horrible verge. I mean to say, I never suspected. (Ruggles of Red Cap, page 124)

In the following passage, Ruggles very earnestly tries to explain the American use of nicknames.

I mean to say, the persons were not all named "Billy", that being used only by way of illustration. Sometimes they would be called "Doc" or "Hanc" or "Al" or "Chris". Nor was my companion invariably called "Shellback". "Horned-toad" and "Stinging-lizard" were also epithets much in favor with his friends. (page 132)

The extreme to which Ruggles carries his care for decorum is shown in his account of Cousin Egbert's falling overboard from a small boat.

There were loud cries of alarm from all, including the woodsman himself, who had kept the craft upright, and in these Mr. Belknap-Jackson heartily joined the moment his head appeared above the surface, calling "Help!" in the quite loudest of tones, which was thoughtless enough, as we were close at hand and could easily have heard his ordinary speaking voice. (page 111)

Ruggles is naively ambitious in the following passage.

It was now, when I had begun to feel a bit at ease in my queer foreign environment, that Mr. Belknap-Jackson broached his ill-starred plan for amateur theatricals. At the first suggestion of this I was im-

mensely taken with the idea, suspecting that he would perhaps present "Hamlet", a part to which I have devoted long and intelligent study and to which I feel that I could bring something which has not yet been imparted to it by even the most skilled of our professional actors. (pages 159-160)

Another kind of passage which characterizes the speaker, and which Wilson is fond of using, is the long, rambling speech, often of a reminiscent character. Sometimes it merely describes something, but usually in a vivid manner.

Aunt Clara, in the same letter to Bunker Bean from which I quoted before, uses a long, rambling sentence embodying advice.

"If you turned your talents to the express business you might learn to manage it yourself because you always had a fine head for such things, and by owning a lot of their stock you could get the other stockholders to elect you to be one of their directors, which would be a fine occupation for you, not too hard work and plenty of time to read good books which I hope you find some now of evenings in place of frittering away your time with associations of questionable character, and ruining your health by late hours and other dissipation though I know you were always of good habits." (pages 110-111)

Breede is another character who uses sentences of this same type, only much more extreme, in the course of dictating to Bunker.

"Take letter G. M. Watkins, Pres'den I'n' N. C. Rai'way," began Breede as Bean entered the room. "Dear sir repline yours of 23d instan' would say Ouch! damn that foot don't take that regardin' traffic' 'greement now'n 'fect that 'casion may

rise'n near future to 'mend same in 'cordance with stip'lations inform'ly made at conf'-rence held las' Janwary will not'fy you'n due time 'f change is made yours very truly have some lunch brought here 'n a minute may haf' t' stay three four days t'll this Whoo! damn foot gets well take letter H. J. Hobbs secon' sistant vice Pres'den' D. 'n' L. S. Rai'way New York, New York, dear Hobbs mark it pers'nal repline yours even date stock purchases goin' forward as rapidly's thought wise under circumstances it is held mos'ly 'n small lots an' too active a market might give rise t' silly notions about it--" (pages 125-126)

Ma Pettengill, in describing the hobo poet, talks for pages without stopping. A short part of this speech will be enough to show us her character.

"That Ben Sutton, now, he's a case. Comes from Alaska and don't like fresh eggs for breakfast because he says they ain't got any kick to 'em like Alaska eggs have along in March, and he's got to have canned milk for his coffee. Say, I got a three-quarter's Jersey down in Red Gap gives milk so rich that the cream just naturally trembles into butter if you speak sharply to it or even give it a cross look. Not for Ben though. Had to send out for canned milk that morning. I drew the line at hunting up case eggs for him though. He had to put up with insipid fresh ones. And fat, that man! My lands! He travels a lot in the West when he does leave home, and he tells me it's the fear of his life he'll get wedged into one of them narrow-gauge Pullmans some time and have to be chopped out. Well, as I was saying--" She paused. (Somewhere in Red Gap, page 7)

A few of Wilson's characters are prone to philosophize. Very often the fact that they really know nothing about what they are talking of adds greatly to the humor. Among those especially fond of this are Ruggles, Mr. Clinch, Mr. Cleaver, the tutor in Oh, Doctor!, and Dave Cowan, the father of the twins. Dave

is the most important of this group, and his philosophy is very original.

"Everything is electricity or something," said Dave, "and it crackles and works on itself until it makes star dust, and it shakes this together till it makes lumps, and they float round, and pretty soon they're big lumps like the moon and like this little ball of star dust we're riding on--and there are millions of them out there all round and about, some a million times bigger than this little one, and they all whirl and whirl, the little ones whirling round the big ones and the big ones whirling round still bigger ones, dancing and swinging and going off to some place that no one knows anything about; and some are old and have lost their people; and some are too young to have any people yet; but millions like this one have people, and on some they are a million years older than we are, and know everything that it'll take us a million years to find out; but even they haven't begun to really know anything--compared with what they don't know. They'll have to go on forever finding out things about what it all means." (The Wrong Twin, page 90)

The next passage I have chosen is taken from the middle of one of his very long speeches. And there are many more very similar to these.

"Anyway, we fought our way up to be a fish with lungs, and then we fought on till we got legs, and here we are. And the only way we got here was by competition--some of us always beating others. Holy rollers like socialists would have us back to one cell and keep us there with equal rewards for all. But she don't work that way. The pot's still a-boiling, and competition is the eternal fire under it." (page 277)

Occasionally in real life we find a person who enjoys imagining to himself certain scenes or sit-

uations, or sometimes whole conversations. In Wilson's works are several good examples of this. We find Merton Gill sitting at his meal in the cafeteria, watching Mr. Henshaw, the movie director, as he eats.

Merton Gill coughed violently, then stared moodily at his plate of baked beans. He hoped that this, at least, would recall him to Henshaw who might fix an eye on him to say: "And, by the way, here is a young actor that was of great help to me this morning." But neither man even glanced up. Seemingly this young actor could choke to death without exciting their notice. He stared less moodily at the baked beans. Henshaw would notice him sometime, and you couldn't do everything at once. (Merton of the Movies, pages 111-112)

Bunker Bean has been abnormally timid all his life. He is a firm believer in reincarnation, and goes to a crystal gazer to discover what or who he was formerly. When he is told that he was Ramtah, an Egyptian king, his mental reaction is worthy of notice. He imagines conversations and interviews with different persons, in which he is very aggressive.

He was veritably a king, yet for a time he must masquerade as a wage-slave, a serf to Breede, and an inferior of Bulger's, considered as a mere spectacle.

He began to word long conversations with these two; noiseless conversations, be it understood, in which the snappy dialogue went unuttered. His sarcasm to Bulger in the matter of that ten-dollar loan was biting, ruthless, witty, invariably leaving the debtor in direct confusion with nothing to retort. Bean always had the last word, both with Bulger and Breede, turning from them with easy contempt.

He was less hard on Breede than on Bulger,

because of the ball game. A man who could behave like that in the presence of baseball must have good in him. Nevertheless, in this silent way, he curtly apprised Breede of his intentions about working beyond stipulated hours, and when Breede was rash enough to adopt a tone of bluster, Bean silenced him with a magnificent "I can imagine nothing of less consequence!"

He carried this silent warfare into public conveyances and when stout aggressive men glared at him because he had a seat he quickly and wittily reduced them to such absurdity in the public eye that they had to flee in impotent rage. The once modest street row with a bully twice his size was enlarged in cast. There were now, as befitted a king, two bullies, who writhed in pain, each with a broken arm, while the slight but muscular youth with a knowledge of jiu-jitsu walked coolly off, flecking dust from one of his capable shoulders. Sometimes he paused long enough to explain the affair, in a few dignified words, to an admiring policeman who found it difficult to believe that this stripling had vanquished two such powerful brutes. Sometimes another act was staged in which he conferred his card upon the amazed policeman and later explained the finesse of his science to him, thereby winning his deathless gratitude. He became quite chummy with this officer and was never to be afraid of anything any more. (pages 112-113)

Again we find Bean imagining something a little different, tinged with sentiment.

But Bean's mind was busy with that older sister, she of the marvellously drooping eyes. He had recognized her at once as the ideal person with whom to be wrecked on a desert island. A flirt, and engaged, too, was she? No matter. He wrecked himself with her, and they lived on mussels and edible roots and berries, and some canned stuff from the ship, and he built a hut of "native thatch", and found a deposit of rubies, gathering bushels of them, and he became her affianced the very day the smoke of the rescuing steamer blackened the horizon. And throughout an idyllic union they always thought rather re-

gretfully of that island; they had had such a beautiful time there. And his oldest son, who was left-handed, pitched a ball that was the despair of every batter in both leagues!  
(pages 126-127)

A favorite device of Wilson's is to make a character become deeply infatuated with some other humorous character, or show extreme admiration, where ordinarily there should be no attraction at all. We find many instances of this, and can here consider only a few of the most important. One of the best known of these cases, perhaps, is the ridiculous infatuation of Professor Coplestone for the Hamburger Queen. The following passage is rich with Wilson's very best humor.

Regretting the wild man, whom I determined to view at another time, I also allowed my mind to dwell upon the neighboring booth, where one of the most beautiful women I have ever beheld was serving refreshments. "See That Fat Woman, the Hamburger Queen", her sign read; with the additional line, "Boys, we make them big. Mustard and Onions Extra". But it was the woman herself who engaged my notice. I have said that she was beautiful. Not with a classic severity, it is true, but running, rather, to a most gracious and appealing amplitude. Technically perhaps her sign did her no gross injustice in the phrase, "that fat woman", yet one would not, I reflected, unless miserably poor in words, so describe this queenly person. Her lovely rounded arms, revealed to the elbow, were magnificently large, but not fat in the accepted sense. Also they were of a dazzling whiteness, as was her broad, low brow--classic, this, at least--beneath its smoothed mass of lightish brown hair, and her plump face except where a tinge of the shyest pink showed in either full cheek. Nor was this coloring, of a bisque daintiness, artificial, as so often happens in these later days. The

woman was natural; she radiated a vast serenity, and the light of her gray warm eyes was the light of knowing benevolence. She reminded me of something I had often before felt, that beauty lies deeper than line or color. I had watched her serving hungry patrons at the counter she graced, always with unruffled calm as one at the edge of troubling activities but untouched by them. Almost I had watched her to the neglect of the perhaps more striking portrait of the wild man. . . .---but I should also purchase some hamburger of the beautiful woman and engage her in conversation, so richly did her personality exhale a soothing balm. (Professor How Could You!, pages 191-192)

A little later Professor Coplestone again describes the object of his admiration.

Presently then I came before the booth of the Hamburger Queen and rejoiced that here, at least, one could profitably pause. The woman was as lovely as I had first thought her, a vast Hebe, her noble contours superbly modeled, and I was newly struck with her serenity, her lifted aloofness from the sordid routine that engaged her. Calm-eyed, deliberate, unruffled by the clamor of patrons who devoured her wares at the counter, she ministered to their wants with an unhurried deftness that made me delight in her movements.

Determined to study this entrancing creature more nearly, I took a place at the board. Without once regarding me she yet, as she put her food before me, conveyed an impression of the finest courtesy. She moved with automatic sureness, her eyes ever along the line of her patrons to forestall their needs. The eyes, I saw, were gray as I had supposed, yet there was a faintly warming hint of blue in the color, and they were shaded by the blackest and longest of lashes. She was all in white, with a white cap at a jaunty angle, that left much of her fair hair revealed.

The very last remark Professor Coplestone makes before the story closes is entertaining. He has been somewhat worried for fear his wife will hear about his infatua-

tion for the Hamburger Queen.

But no hint of that other--the woman vast, serene, witty and all-tolerant--has reached her. One golden memory, untouched, untarnished, I may keep for secret rejoicing. This is mine alone; no alien carping shall ever desecrate it. Often I shall think of the woman, something light and with wings!  
(Pages 339-340)

Other characters are also victims of this strange infatuation. Wilbur Cowan greatly admires gypsies, and really looks upon them as superior beings. Merton Gill claims as his heroine Beulah Baxter, the movie actress. He goes to as many of her pictures as possible, and reads everything about her that he can find. Bunker Bean has an abnormal admiration for the crystal gazer, Countess Casanova, and thinks of her in much the same way as Professor Copplestone does of the Hamburger Queen.

He entered a small, dimly lighted room and stood there uncertainly. After a moment two heavy curtains parted at the rear of the room and the Countess Casanova stood before him. It could have been no other; her lustrous, heavy-lidded dark eyes swept him soothingly. Her hair was a marvellously piled storm-cloud above a full, well-rounded face. Her complexion was wonderful. One very plump, very white hand rested at the neck of the scarlet robe she wore. A moment she posed thus, beyond doubt a being capable of expounding all wingy mysteries of any soul whatsoever. (Bunker Bean, page 60)

Another favorite device of Wilson is the ease with which a character is made to believe some absurd thing which, it should be perfectly evident, is not true.

One of our very best examples of this is Bunker Bean. When he is told by the Crystal Gazer that he was formerly Napoleon, he is very happy. But when he reads all the material he can find on Napoleon, and discovers that he had undesirable characteristics as well as desirable ones, he is dissatisfied, and wishes to learn in what form he existed centuries earlier. Professor Balthasar has no difficulty at all in making Bean believe that he was once an Egyptian king, and that his mummy can be found and sent to him. Even when he receives the mummy, he seems perfectly content, and feels no doubt at all that it is his former self.

In The Boss of Little Arcady, from which I have quoted very little, we have another character who is easily deceived. This is J. Rodney Potts, who has long been the chief worry of Little Arcady. He never does any work, and when he does get a little money, spends it for drink. The citizens finally unite and give him a good sum of money, and a great many excellent recommendations, telling him what a wonderful success he has always been, and how they hate to lose him. But they advise him to go to a larger place for his own good, for he has climbed as high as he can go in Little Arcady. The town paper even has a great long article about Little Arcady's leading and much-honored citizen. Potts believes that all this is really sincere, and goes all over town reading people the testimonials. Incidentally, he spends

the entire sum of money drinking and treating the rabble of the town, and when it is all gone, there he is, still in Little Arcady.

In Professor Coplestone we find an excellent illustration of faith in an idea which has been imparted to him. The Professor is describing Sooner Jackson's fidelity to an old Indian chief, who has given him the secret for making a wonderful health potion. To Professor Coplestone this medicine show is as serious and sacred a thing as could be found.

. . . He had, it seemed, many years previous while traveling among the famed Rocky Mountains, saved the life of an aged Indian chief, who in gratitude revealed to him the formula for a wonderful potion that almost miraculously cured a wide range of ailments. Though compounded of simple herbs and barks, the secret of its preparation had been jealously guarded by the aged chief until the gallant behavior of Mr. Jackson melted his stoicism. Before imparting the priceless formula, however, the chieftain obliged my companion to swear that he would devote his remaining years to putting the remedy within reach of all white sufferers.

The oath had been kept. I could not doubt this as my companion in narrating the incident became really impassioned, rising to heights of oratory that I found truly affecting, while his dark eyes glowed with the earnest, almost fanatic light of one dedicated to the relief of human misery. . . .

Though the formula was simple as to ingredients, their assembling required the nicest care, and he, loyal and forthright soul, had steadfastly resolved that the standard should not be lowered--this at sacrifice of the immense fortune inevitably his had his conscience permitted him to sanction factory methods and quantity production. (pages 105-106)

Ruggles deeply admires the negro servant, Mr. Water-

man, and in his description of him we see the absurd things which he has been made to believe.

The butler proved to be a genuine black-amoor, a Mr. Waterman, he informed me, his wife, also a black, being the cook. An elderly creature of the utmost gravity of bearing, he brought to his professional duties a finish, a dignity, a manner in short that I have scarce known excelled among our own serving people. And a creature he was of the most eventful past, as he informed me at our first encounter. As a slave he had commanded an immensely high price, some twenty thousand dollars, as the American money is called, and two prominent slave-holders had once fought a duel to the death over his possession. Not many, he assured me, had been so eagerly sought after, they being for the most part held cheaper--"common black trash", he put it.

Early tiring of the life of slavery, he had fled to the wilds and for some years led a desperate band of outlaws whose crimes soon put a price upon his head. He spoke frankly and with considerable regret of these lawless years. At the outbreak of the American war, however, with a reward of fifty thousand dollars offered for his body, he had boldly surrendered to their Secretary of State for War, receiving a full pardon for his crimes on condition that he assist in directing the military operations against the slaveholding aristocracy. Invaluable he had been in this service, I gathered, two generals, named respectively Grant and Sherman, having repeatedly assured him that but for his aid they would more than once in sheer despair have laid down their swords.

I could readily imagine that after these years of strife he had been glad to embrace the peaceful calling in which I found him engaged. He was, as I have intimated, a person of lofty demeanor, with a vein of high seriousness. Yet he would unbend at moments as frankly as a child and play at a simple game of chance with a pair of dice. This he was good enough to teach to myself and gained from me quite a number of shillings that I chanced to have. (Ruggles of Red Gap, pages 101-102)

Much of the humor in Wilson's novels is due to certain characters who have false impressions or mistaken ideas of some sort. This is caused by different things--sometimes pure ignorance, and sometimes by a secluded, sheltered life. Ruggles is one of our most humorous characters in this respect. He is extremely dignified, and cannot understand anyone who is not. He evidently has never been around or observed little children, and is greatly shocked at the sight of a fat, chubby little baby.

. . . It was a male child of some two and a half years, rather suggesting the generous good-nature of the mother, but in the most shocking condition, a thing I should have spoken strongly to her about at once had I known her better. Queer it seemed to me that a woman of her apparently sound judgment should let her offspring reach this terrible state without some effort to alleviate it. The poor thing, to be blunt, was grossly corpulent, legs, arms, body, and face being wretchedly fat, and yet she now fed it a large slice of bread thickly spread with butter and loaded to overflowing with the fattening sweet. Banting of the strictest sort was of course what it needed. I have had but the slightest experience with children, but there could be no doubt of this if its figure was to be maintained. Its waistline was quite impossible, and its eyes, as it owlshly scrutinized me over its superfluous food, showed from a face already quite as puffy as the Honourable George's. I did, indeed, venture so far as suggesting that food at untimely hours made for a too-rounded outline, but to my surprise the mother took this as a tribute to the creature's grace, crying, "Yes, he wuzzum wuzzums a fatty ole sing", with an air of most fatuous pride, and followed this by announcing my name to it with concerned precision. (Ruggles of Red Gap, pages 173-174)

And again he makes the following observations on the child.

. . . The child, incautiously left in the kitchen at the mercy of the female black, had with criminal stupidity been stuffed with food, traces of almost every course of the dinner being apparent upon its puffy countenance. Being now in a stupor from over-feeding, I was obliged to lug the thing over my shoulder. I resolved to warn the mother at an early opportunity of the perils of an unrestricted diet, although the deluded creature seemed actually to glory in its corpulence. . . . (pages 255-256

Ruggles shows a lack of understanding when he feels Cousin Egbert highly honored because he has been considered the best type for a certain character in a play.

There remained but one part to fill, that of the father of the serving-maid, an uncouth sort of drinking-man, quite low-class, who, in my opinion, should never have been allowed on the stage at all, since no moral lesson is taught by him. It was in the casting of this part that Mr. Jackson showed himself of a forgiving nature. He offered it to Cousin Egbert, saying he was the true "type"--"with his weak, dissolute face"--and that "types" were all the rage in theatricals.

At first the latter heatedly declined the honour, but after being urged and browbeaten for three days by Mrs. Effie he somewhat sullenly consented, being shown that there were not many lines for him to learn. (page 161)

Mrs. Effie worries quite a lot about Cousin Egbert's lack of manners. The following speech shows us something of her own ignorance.

. . . "--and of course we're obliged to have him, though he's dropped whatever manners I've taught him and picked up his old rough talk, and he eats until you wonder how he can. It's awful! Sometimes I've wondered if it couldn't be adenoids--there's a lot

of talk about those just now--some very select people have them, and perhaps they're what kept him back and made him so hopelessly low in his tastes, but I just know he'd never go to a doctor about them. (Ruggles of Red Gap, page 181)

Ruggles has a strong tendency to take everything literally.

Then, as my eye caught the vague outlines of a settlement or village in the midst of this valley, Cousin Egbert, who also looked from the coach window, amazed me by crying out: "There she is--little old Red Gap! The fastest growing town in the State, if anyone should ask you."

"Yes, sir; I'll try to remember, sir," I said, wondering why I should be asked this.

"Garden spot of the world," he added in a kind of ecstasy to which I made no response, for this was too preposterous. (pages 124-125)

Mrs. Bines, whose literalness we have already noted, presents a humorous effect by her firm belief in everything which she hears. For example:

Then came the crossing of the sullen, sluggish Missouri, that highway of an earlier day to the great Northwest; and after that the better wooded and better settled lands of Iowa and Illinois.

"Now we're getting where Christians live," said Percival, with warm appreciation.

"Why, Percival," exclaimed his mother, reprovingly, "do you mean to say there aren't any Christians in Montana City? How you talk! There are lots of good Christian people there, though I must say I have my doubts about that new Christian Science church they started last spring." (The Spenders, page 136)

Again, when Percival has been joking with his mother, we find the following speech.

"Do you know," Mrs. Bines thoughtfully observed to her daughter, "I sometimes mistrust Percival ain't just right in his head; you remember he did have a bad fall on it when he was two years and five months old--two years, five months, and eighteen days. The way he carries on right before folks' faces! That time I went through the asylum at Butte there was a young man kept going on with the same outlandish rigamarole just like Percival. The idea of Percival telling me to eat a lemon-ice with an ice-pick, and 'Oh, why don't the flesh-brushes wear nice, proper clothes-brushes!' and be sure and hammer my nails good and hard after I get them manicured. And back home he was always wanting to know where the meat-augers were, saying he'd just bought nine hundred new ones and he'd have to order a ton more if they were all lost. I don't believe there is such a thing as a meat-auger. I don't know what on earth a body could do with one. And that other young man," she concluded significantly, "they had him in a little bit of a room with an iron-barred door to it like a prison-cell." (page 142)

Rufus Billop is another of Wilson's characters very rich in mistaken ideas--in his case because of the way he has been reared at home. His mother, an invalid herself, considered her child one also, and really kept him from being well. In the following passages we shall see the influence which this had on the mind of Rufus.

His mother had warned him especially about going close to queer people, and here he was recklessly close to a giant, a fat woman, a living skeleton--who certainly had something dangerous--or the dog-faced man or the dwarf who was forty-eight years old and--Rufus knew--much too small for his age. . . .

He was glad to be out of this room, hoping he hadn't caught too many of the things those queer ones must be suffering from. And he stoically declined lemonade and popcorn, being certain that these would

disable him. He divined again, though, that he was disappointing his father, and accepted a bag of peanuts with pretended delight. From this he ate three in a noisy manner, wondering if they would sicken him before he had seen the real circus. The rest he dropped as they worked through the crowd to their seats. His father, he decided, simply wasn't aware of all the dangers that surrounded little boys. . . .

For one reason, he hardly cared to have his mother know that he had been close to queer people who must have a lot of things one would catch. It was possible that he had already caught what would make him a living skeleton or a dwarf. (Oh, Doctor!, pages 15-16)

A little later in his life, we find Rufus with some very unusual ideas, still due to the type of life he has always led. One of these is shown when Aunt Sena goes to the city for a henna pack.

He had supposed a henna pack to describe some new medication of the human frame, one of those novelties of which Aunt Sena had been a prolific discoverer through wide reading of advertisements, and had--rather wistfully--expected that she would later prescribe the same treatment for himself. But as it turned out, a henna pack merely meant that Aunt Sena had gone to town and had her hair dyed a flagrant tint. (pages 35-36)

Merton Cill is another character who always takes everything literally.

I had a long talk today with the lady out in front that hires the actors, and she was very friendly, but said it might be quite some time, because only two companies on the lot were shooting to-day, and she said if Gashwiler had promised to keep my old job for me to be sure and not forget his address, and it was laughable that she should say such

a thing, because I would not be liable to forget his address when I lived there so long. She must have thought I was very forgetful, to forget that address. (Merton of the Movies, page 63)

A little later the same situation is seen from another point of view.

She seemed to like him as an occasional caller, but she remained smilingly skeptical about his immediate success in the pictures. Again and again she urged him not to forget the address of Giggerholder or Gooshswamp or whoever it might be that was holding a good job for him. He never failed to remind her that the name was Gashwiler, and that he could not possibly forget the address because he had lived at Simsbury a long time. This always seemed to brighten the woman's day. It puzzled him to note that for some reason his earnest assurance pleased her. (pages 64-65)

Professor Coplestone, like Ruggles, is one of our most humorous characters in many ways. Like Ruggles, he is always misinterpreting some remark made to him.

My wounded companion would eagerly direct me to the right turn at crossroads and at the same time adjure me to greater speed. Doing this he would address me as Bo. "Take the right turn, Bo. Keep her moving, Bo!" And twice he said, "Pretty fast company you are, Bo!" which I took as a tribute to my skill in driving, and wished Mrs. Coplestone might have heard. (Professor How Could You!, page 60)

The Professor knows practically nothing of farm life, and his description of a silo is very original.

From time to time we passed farmsteads where a single tall tower, stark with a Greek simplicity, loomed in the growing light.

My companion said that these things were silos, and I was content with hearing the musical name. Though doubtless they serve a utilitarian purpose I have never learned what this may be, nor shall I ever wish to. It seemed to me that these daringly chaste structures had been named by a singer and might well have been erected for their beauty alone. (page 118)

Equally humorous is the opinion which Professor Coplestone has of the Gus Reddick show which he has just joined.

One of the largest vans stood broadside to me and across it in great letters of gold on a dull-red ground ran the inscription "Gus Reddick's All-Star Theatrical Aggregation". In smaller letters beneath were the words, "Living Actors in Latest New York Drama Successes".

On several occasions Mrs. Coplestone and I had gone to the city to witness eminent players in Shakespearean roles, but I had never, to my knowledge, seen a late New York success. Now I was not only to see many but I had actually crossed a boundary into that magic world beyond the footlights. All about me living actors were engaged in driving stakes or hauling on ropes to elevate sheets of canvas, and I presently threw off my dejection. I was one of a band of strolling players, mountebanks, drolls, mimes, merry-andrews, and I reflected a pretty while upon the new excitements doubtless in store for me. (page 271)

Very closely related to those examples which we have just been studying is another device of humor which Wilson uses a great deal--some ridiculous idea of a character because of lack of knowledge of the country or the section of the country in which he then is. We find examples of this running through The Lions of the Lord, Professor How Could You!, and The Spenders. Ruggles of

Red Gap is full of them.

When the members of the Bines family in The Spenders, go to New York, after having spent their lives in Montana, many amusing things take place. One of the best illustrations, perhaps, is Billy Brue's idea of the city.

. . .By day Billy Brue walked the streets in a decent, orderly trance of bewilderment. He was properly puzzled and amazed by many strange matters. He never could find out what was "going on" to bring so many folks into town. They all hurried somewhere constantly, but he was never able to reach the centre of excitement. Nor did he ever learn how anyone could reach those high clothes-lines, strung forty feet above ground between the backs of houses; nor how there could be "so many shows in town, all on one night"; nor why you could get so many good things to eat by merely buying a "slug of whiskey"; nor why a thousand people weren't run over in Broadway each twenty-four hours. (page 333)

Just as in other methods of gaining a humorous effect, so in this one, we find that Ruggles is one of Wilson's best characters. Among the things which Ruggles always finds confusing are social conditions in America, customs of all sorts, many phrases very common in our speech, and the geographical divisions of America. The following short passages will show this lack of geographical knowledge. Before Ruggles left England, this conversation occurred.

"You are going to America, Ruggles."

"Yes, sir; North or South, sir?"

"North, I fancy; somewhere on the West coast-- Ohio, Omaha, one of those Indian places."

"Perhaps Indiana or the Yellowstone Valley, sir." (Ruggles of Red Gap, page 18)

Next, we have Ruggles' impressions of America as he was landing.

We were soon steaming into the harbour of one of their large cities. Chicago, I fancied it to be, until the chance remark of an American who looked to be a well-informed fellow identified it as New York. I was much annoyed now at the behaviour of Cousin Egbert, who burst into silly cheers at the slightest excuse, a passing steamer, a green hill, or a rusty statue of quite ungainly height which seemed to be made of crude iron. . . . A long time we were detained by customs officials who seemed rather overwhelmed by the gowns and millinery of Mrs. Effie, but we were at last free and taken through the streets of the crude New American city of New York to a hotel overlooking what I dare say in their simplicity they call their Hyde Park. (pages 87-88)

Ruggles applies to American "states" the British term "counties". In the following description he shows his vague geographical conception of the American continent.

This journey began pleasantly enough, and through the farming counties of Philadelphia, Ohio, and Chicago was not without interest. Beyond came an incredibly large region, much like the steppes of Siberia, I fancy; vast uninhabited stretches of heath and down, with but here and there some rude settlement about which the poor peasants would eagerly assemble as our train passed through. I could not wonder that our own travellers have always spoken so disparagingly of the American civilization. (page 123)

In the following passage, Ruggles shows his disgust with American methods of advertising, as well as his ignorance of geography.

"Coffee like mother used to make", read one. Impertinently intimate this, professing a familiarity with one's people that would never do with us. "Try our Boston Baked Beans", pleaded another, quite abjectly. And several others quite indelicately stated the prices at which the different dishes might be had: "Irish Stew, 25 cents"; "Philadelphia Capon, 35 cents"; "Fried Chicken, Maryland, 50 cents"; "New York Fancy Broil, 40 cents". Indeed the poor chap seemed to have been possessed by a geographical mania, finding it difficult to submit the simplest viands without crediting them to distant towns or provinces. (page 220)

The following remarks of Ruggles are short, but full of meaning. I believe they will sufficiently explain themselves.

I think I had become resigned to the unending series of shocks that seemed to compose the daily life in North America. . . . (page 122)

More than once I had deplored this rather Bohemian taste of the Honourable George which led him to associate with Americans as readily as with persons of his own class. . . . (page 9)

The large room was of course atrociously impossible in the American fashion, with unsightly walls, the floors covered with American cloth of a garish pattern, and the small, oblong tables and flimsy chairs vastly uninviting. . . . (page 220)

When I say that the beast in question was quite an American dog, obviously of no breeding whatever, my dismay will be readily imagined. . . . (page 175)

I thanked him for the item, resolving to add it to my list of curious Americanisms. Already I had begun a narrative of my adventures in this wild land, a thing I had tentatively entitled, "Alone in North America". . . . (page 153)

And as I worked over the open fire, doing the trout to a turn, stirring the beans, and perfecting the stew with deft touches of seasoning, I worded to myself for the first time a most severe indictment against the North American cookery, based upon my observations across the continent and my experience as a diner-out in Red Cap. . . . (page 201)

Mr. Belknap-Jackson, whom Ruggles meets here in America, seems to impress him more favorably than most Americans.

Indeed he was quite the most intelligent foreigner I had encountered. I may seem to exaggerate in the American fashion, but I doubt if a single one of the others could have named the counties of England or the present Lord Mayor of London. (page 122)

Ruggles seems quite shocked at the social organization of the country, as compared with England.

Social lines in the town seemed to have been drawn by no rule whatever. There were actually tradesmen who seemed to matter enormously; on the other hand, there were those of undoubted qualifications, like Mrs. Pettengill, for example, and Cousin Egbert, who deliberately chose not to matter, and mingled as freely with the Bohemian set as they did with the county families. Thus one could never be quite certain whom one was meeting. (page 156)

Again, Ruggles makes an amusing comment on American names.

I gathered at once that the Americans have actually named one of our colonies "Washington" after the rebel George Washington, though one would have thought that the indelicacy of this would have been only too apparent. But, then, I recalled, as well, the city where their so-called parliament assembles, Washington D. C. Doubtless

the initials indicate that it was named in "honour" of another member of this notorious family. I could not but reflect how shocked our King would be to learn of this effrontery. (page 50)

Ruggles seems to feel that the mountain roads should be kept up in the same way that private estates in England are. He cannot understand the American landscape at all.

The mountains were now literally quite everywhere, some higher than others, but all of a rough appearance, and uninviting in the extreme. The narrow path, moreover, became more and more difficult, and seemed altogether quite insane with its twistings and fearsome declivities. One's first thought was that at least a bit of road-metal might have been put upon it. But there was no sign of this throughout our toilsome day, nor did I once observe a rustic seat along the way, although I saw an abundance of suitable nooks for these. Needless to say, in all England there is not an estate so poorly kept up. (pages 184-185)

To Ruggles, with all his dignity and preciseness, the minstrel show proves to be too much. In speaking of it, he says:

That which followed was so atrociously personal that in any country but America we could have had an action against them.

. . .

It is best told in a few words, this affair of the minstrel performance, which I understood was to be an entertainment wherein the participants darkened themselves to resemble blackamoors. Naturally, I did not attend, it being agreed that the best people should signify their disapproval by staying away, but the disgraceful affair was recounted to me in all its

details by more than one of the large audience that assembled. (page 164)

Ruggles' description of the songs and dances of America is humorous.

I had now to confess that I was unskilled in the native American folk-dances which I had observed being performed. . . . (page 134)

The evening passed in a refined manner with cards and music, the latter being emitted from a phonograph which I was asked to attend to and upon which I reproduced many of their quaint North American folksongs, such as "Everybody Is Doing It", which has a rare native rhythm. . . . (page 107)

Ruggles' comment on our churches is amusing.

. . . And, though there was no proper church in the town--only dissenting chapels, Methodist, Presbyterian, and such outlandish persuasions--I attended services each Sabbath, and more than once had tea with what at home would have been the vicar of the parish. (page 159)

Ruggles cannot quite understand the feeling of patriotism stirred by the sight of the American flag.

It is, of course, known to us that the natives are given to making rather a silly noise over this flag of theirs, but in this instance--the pioneer fighting his way into the wilderness and hoisting it above his frontier home--I felt strangely indisposed to criticise. I understood that he could be greatly cheered by the flag of the country he had left behind. (pages 95-96)

Perhaps one of the most humorous of all of Ruggles' impressions is recorded in the following passage.

The two fell to talking of other things, chiefly of their cattle plantations and the price of beef-stock, which then seemed

to be six and one-half, though what this meant I had no notion. Also I gathered that the Mixer at her own cattle-farm had been watching her calves marked with her monogram, though I would never have credited her with so much sentiment.  
(page 206)

Another method which Wilson uses to produce humor is the creation of absent-minded individuals. His two best are Professor Coplestone and Professor Hemingway, both in the same story. Bergson says:

Absentmindedness, indeed, is not perhaps the actual fountain-head of the comic, but surely it is contiguous to a certain stream of facts and fancies which flows straight from the fountain-head. It is situated, so to say, on one of the great natural watersheds of laughter. . . .  
(page 12)

Absentmindedness is always comical. Indeed, the deeper the absentmindedness the higher the comedy. (page 146)

Repetition within a book, of actions characteristic of an individual, soon makes that person more or less humorous. This device is often cleverly used by Wilson. In The Wrong Twin the impression made upon Mr. Peck by Miss Hick's feet, and the repeated mention of it, becomes very amusing.

"Take his mind off himself," added Mr. Peck, his lusterless eyes unwaveringly upon the points of a pair of patent-leather slippers firmly placed before Miss Hicks.  
. . . (page 99)

Miss Hicks briefly tapped the right slipper under the beady regard of Mr. Peck. . . . (page 101)

Mr. Peck said, his eyes on the right

slipper pushed forward by its wearer when she spoke, "My dear young lady!" . . .  
(page 99)

Beneath the modishly short skirt might be seen the patent-leather slippers that the aged Mr. Peck had found noteworthy. (page 111)

Harvey D. Whipple in The Wrong Twin is a very interesting character, and one reason for this is his fastidiousness. In a conversation of the three Whipples, with regard to adopting Wilbur Cowan, the little mannerisms of Harvey D. add real humor to the story.

He walked now to an ash tray and fastidiously trimmed the end of his cigarette. . . . (page 116)

Harvey D. walked to the opposite wall and straightened a picture, The Reading of Homer, shifting its frame precisely one half an inch. . . . (page 116)

Harvey D. paused in his walk, regarded the floor in front of him critically, and stopped to pick up a tiny scrap of paper, which he brought to the table and laid ceremoniously in the ash tray. (page 116)

Harvey D. here made loose-wristed gestures meaning despair, after which he detected and put in its proper place a burned match beside Sharon's chair.  
(page 116)

"A bright boy enough!" said Gideon after another silence, during which Harvey D. had twice paced the length of the room, taking care to bring each of his patent-leather toes precisely across the repeated pattern in the carpet. . . . (page 116)

He went to a far corner of the room and changed the position of an immense

upholstered chair so that it was equidistant from each wall. . . . (pages 116-117)

"There really doesn't seem any other way," said Harvey D. at the table, putting a disordered pile of magazines into neat alignment. (page 118)

In many instances Wilson secures a humorous effect by the complete reversal of a character during the course of the story. We find as much of this in The Wrong Twin as anywhere, perhaps. The most noticeable transformation comes in the twins, Merle and Wilbur. At the opening of the story, Merle is the nice, quiet, well-behaved child, while Wilbur is the worry of the family. But gradually we see a change, and after the war, they have reversed completely. Wilbur has settled down, and is really worth something; Merle is now an editor, and a "Red". He is cynical, and has very few friends.

Winona Penniman, in the same book, also makes a considerable change. In the early part of the story the following description of her shows her very prim and exacting.

Winona at twenty was old before she should have been. . . . The dress she wore was one of her best--for an exemplary young man would call that evening, bringing his choice silver flute upon which he would play justly if not brilliantly to Winona's piano accompaniment--but it was of dull tint, one of her mother's plain, not fancy, creations. Still Winona felt it was daring, because the collar was low and sported a fichu of lace. This troubled her, even as she renewed the earnest effort to know Matthew Arnold. She doubtfully fingered at her throat a tiny chain that supported a

tiny pendant. She slipped the thing under the neck of her waist. She feared that with her low neck--she thought of it as low--the bauble would be flashy. (pages 62-63)

Dave Cowan at one time gave Winona a pair of silk stockings for Christmas, but she was always afraid to wear them.

She had put them on with her new tan pumps, but the effect had been too daring. She felt the ogling eyes. The stockings had gone back to the third bureau drawer--to the bottom--and never had her ankles flashed a silken challenge to a public that might misunderstand. (pages 63-64)

Just before Wilbur Cowan goes away to war, we see a very great change in Winona. Wilbur asks her to go with him on the last night to a new restaurant, where there will be dancing until late. She consents, and the description of her as she buys her dancing slippers is rather humorous.

"I wish to purchase," she began through slightly relaxed lips, "a pair of satin dancing slippers like those in your window--high-heeled, one strap, and possibly with those jewelled buckles." She here paused for another breath, then continued tremendously: "Something in a shade to go with--with these!"

With dainty brazenness the small hand at her knee obeyed an amazing command from her disordered brain and raised the neat brown skirt of Winona a full two inches, to reveal a slim ankle between which and an ogling world there gleamed but the thinnest veneer of tan silk. (pages 259-260)

In the following paragraph we have a humorous description of a change which comes over Sharon Whipple in the course of the story, when he decides to buy a

motor car.

Sharon, the summer before, after stoutly affirming for two years that he would never have one of the noisy things on the place, even though the Whipple New Place now boasted two--boasting likewise of their speed and convenience--and even though Gideon Whipple jestingly called him a fossilized barnacle on the ship of progress, had secretly bought a motor car and secretly for three days taken instructions in its running from the city salesman who delivered it. His intention was to become daringly expert in its handling and flash upon the view of the discomfited Gideon, who had not yet driven a car. He would wheel carelessly up the drive to the Whipple New Place in apparently contemptuous mastery of the thing, and he would specifically deny ever having received any driving lessons whatever, thus by falsehood overwhelming his brother with confusion. (The Wrong Twin, pages 160-161)

Very interesting is the study of the character of Ruggles throughout the story. At first he cannot become reconciled to America, and judges everything by English standards. But very gradually we can see him yielding a little at a time, until at the conclusion of the story, he seems very happy in America, and willing to adopt American customs.

Percival Bines in The Spenders is quite an interesting character. At first, after the death of his father, his Uncle Peter wants him to step into his father's place in Montana, and carry on the business. But Percival loves society, and wishes to use his wealth in the East. While he and his mother and sister, and also Uncle Peter, are in New York City, Percival becomes

more and more reckless in his spending of money. When he discovers that he has lost about twelve million in Wall Street, he appears to be crushed for a short time, but soon regains his spirits, and seems like a new person. From that time on to the end of the story his character becomes completely reversed, and he is very sensible.

Rufus Billop makes one of the greatest changes of any of Wilson's characters. A chronic invalid all his life, Billop has always been able to find new symptoms. It has always given him pleasure to have something wrong with him. But suddenly he becomes interested in life, and has everything to live for, the chief attractions being his new car and his nurse, though he will not admit this. Just at this time he has a dreadful accident in his car, and is picked up more dead than alive. The rest of the story is filled with his struggle to regain his health and strength, a thing for which he had no desire earlier in the story.

Bunker Bean has been abnormally timid all his life. The assurance given him by the crystal gazer, that he formerly was Napoleon, gives him some self-respect. Later, when he is told that he first was an Egyptian king, he gains even more courage and self-possession. He acquires what he thinks is his mummy, and feels that it is a part of himself. But the real

change in him comes when the dog, Nap, tears the mummy to pieces, and it is revealed to Bean how badly he has been deceived.

Another important character who undergoes a great change is Professor Coplestone. He is first known to us as a poor, hen-pecked husband, who seems to have no mind of his own at all. Throughout his various adventures he has a wonderful variety of experiences, and each of these helps to give him a little more confidence in himself. Before the story closes he becomes a person perfectly capable of speaking his thoughts, and of coping with any situation which might arise.

Many other characters show just as interesting changes as those already mentioned. Some of them are Orlando Cleaver, Peter Bines, Aunt Sena, and Breede.

One more method used by Wilson for humorous character portrayal is worthy of mention in this chapter, because it shows his knowledge of children. This is the use of humorous childish acts and ideas. There are not a great many children in Wilson's novels, but those he does have are very true to life. We can be sure that he is a close observer of children, as well as of adults.

The first example from *The Boss of Little Arcady* is very simple. It merely shows how well-acquainted Wilson is with a child's talk in play. Solon Denny's little girl is playing house.

"Why, how do you do? Yes, it's lovely weather we're having. Are your children got the scarlet fever? That's too bad. So has mine. I'm afraid they'll die. Well, I must be going now. Good day!"

The following bit of description from The Spenders quite vividly portrays child character.

Of another member of Mrs. Akemit's household Percival acknowledged the sway with never a misgiving. He had been the devoted lover of Baby Akemit from the afternoon when he had first cajoled her into autobiography--a vivid, fire-tipped little thing with her mother's piquancy. He gleaned that day that she was "a quarter to four years old"; that she was mamma's girl, but papa was a friend of Santa Claus; that she went to "ball-dances" every day clad in "dest a stirt 'cause big ladies don't ever wear waist-es at night"; that she had once ridden in a merry-go-round and it made her "all homesick right here", patting her stomach; and that "elephants are horrid, but you mustn't be cruel to them and cut their eyes out. Oh, no!" (page 243)

Prudence, a little Mormon girl in The Lions of the Lord, has heard the phrase "generation of vipers". She of course does not understand the term, but is attracted by it.

He waited by her until sleep should come, but her mind had been stirred, and long after he thought she slept she startled him by asking, in a voice of entire wakefulness: "If I am a good little girl, and learn all the right things--then can I be a generation of vipers?" She lingered with relish on the phrase, giving each syllable with distinctness and gusto. (page 287)

The Wrong Twin is the richest of all Wilson's novels in humor produced by children. Patricia Whipple has a vivid imagination, and in talking she likes to use expressions which she has read in books.

"Ben Blunt?" questioned both twins.

"That's whom I am going to be. That's whom I am now--or just as soon as I change clothes with some unfortunate. It's in a book. 'Ben Blunt, the Newsboy; or, From Rags to Riches'. He run off because his cruel stepmother beat him black and blue, and he become a mere street urchin, though his father, Mr. Blunt, was a gentleman in good circumstances; and while he was a mere street urchin he sold papers and blacked boots, and he was an honest, manly lad and become adopted by a kind, rich old gentleman named Mr. Pettigrew, that he saved from a gang of rowdies that boded him no good, and was taken to his palatial mansion and given a kind home and a new suit of clothes and a good Christian education, and that's how he got from rags to riches. And I'm going to be it; I'm going to be a mere street urchin and do everything he did." (pages 12-13)

Patricia is asked why she is trying to be a boy, if they are so bad.

"You're too young to understand if I told you," she replied with a snappish dignity. (page 14)

Later, when she is telling the twins about her troubles, and her desire to run away, she says,

"Anyway, it'll be better than here where I suffered so terribly with everybody making the vilest scenes about any little thing that happened. After they find it's too late they'll begin to wish they'd acted kinder. But I won't ever come back, not if they beg me with tears streaming down their faces, after the vile way they acted; saying maybe I could have a baby brother after Harvey D. got that stepmother, but nothing was ever done about it, and just because I tried to hide Mrs. Wadley's baby that comes to wash, and then because I tried to get that gypsy woman's baby, because everyone knows they're always stealing other people's babies, and she

made a vile scene, too, and everyone tortured me beyond endurance." (pages 21-22)

When trying to decide to go into the cemetery to pick berries, the Cowan twins have quite an argument, of which this is a part.

"Well, I'm afraid of things that ain't true that scare you in the dark," he admitted, "but I ain't afraid like that now. Not one bit!"

"Well, I dare you to go."

"Well, of course I'll go. I was just resting a minute. I got to rest a little, haven't I?"

"Well, I guess you're rested. I guess you can climb a plain and simple fence, can't you? You can rest over there, can't you--just as well as what you can rest here?"  
(page 6)

After they have entered the cemetery, they are still a bit nervous, especially after reading some of the tombstones. The following conversation is amusing.

"It says, 'Here lies Jonas Whipple, aged eighty-seven,' and it says, 'he passed to his reward April 23, 1828,' and here's his picture."

He pointed to the rounded top of the stone where was graven a circle inclosing primitive eyes, a nose, and mouth. From the bottom of the circle on either side protruded wings.

Merle drew near to scan the device. He was able to divine that the intention of the artist had not been one of portraiture.

"That ain't either his picture," he said, heatedly. "That's a cupid!"

"Ho, gee, gosh! Ain't cupids got legs? Where's its legs?"

"Then it's an angel."

"Angels are longer, I know now--it's a goop. And here's some more reading." (p. 8)

Wilbur, who has suddenly acquired a little bit of money, feels quite wealthy, and decides to buy something for the different members of the family. The following speech is after he has been looking at a stuffed blue jay.

"Say, you keep him for me till I make my mind up. If anybody else comes along, don't you sell him to anybody else till I tell you, because prob'ly I'll simply buy him. My father, he loves animals." (page 43)

And after he has made his purchases, he goes home and says,

"I bet nobody can guess what I brought! Yes, sir--a beautiful present for everyone--that will make a new man of poor old Judge Penniman, and this lovely orange--that's for Mrs. Penniman--and I bet Winona can't guess what's wrapped up in this box for her--it's the most beautiful album, and this first-class animal for my father, and it'll last a life-time if he takes care of it good; and I got me a dog to watch the house."

A little later, Wilbur speaks quite humorously of his dog.

The dog, Frank, sniffing up timidly at Mouser on the porch rail, displeased her. From her perch she leaned down to curse him hissingly, with arched back and swollen tail, a potent forearm with drawn claws curving forward in menace.

"You will, will you?" demanded Wilbur again, freeing his legs from the leash in which the dismayed dog had entwined them.

Frank now fell on his back with limp paws in air and simpered girlishly up at his envenomed critic on the railing.

"We got to keep that old cat out the way. He eats 'em up--that's all he does, eats 'em! It's a good thing I was here to make him mind me." (page 70)

Another humorous idea is presented in the following:

Once--years ago, it seemed to him-- he had heard talk of the Whipple nose. This one had the Whipple nose, or that one did not have the Whipple nose; and it had been his understanding that the Whipple family possessed but one nose in common; sometimes one Whipple had it; then another Whipple would have it. At the time this had seemed curious, but in no way anomalous. He had readily pictured a Whipple nose being worn now by one and now by another of this family. (page 80)

Wilson describes children's actions as well as their thought and speech, as we see here.

Patricia Whipple wished to descend to the very heart of the camp, while Juliana could be seen informing the child that they were near enough. To make this definite she sat upon the bole of a felled oak beside the path while Patricia jiggled up and down in eloquent objection to the untimely halt. (page 97)

Wilbur thinks of his father's printing press in an odd way.

It was especially thrilling, because if you should keep your hand in there until the jaws closed you wouldn't have it any longer. (page 147)

One of the most humorous ideas is that of Wilbur concerning the adoption of Merle by the Whipple family.

The Wilbur twin was abashed and puzzled.

The detail most impressing him seemed to be that, having no longer a brother, he would cease to be a twin. His life long he had been made intensely conscious of being a twin--he was one of a pair--and now suddenly, he gathered, he was something whole and complete in himself. He demanded assurance on this point.

"Then I'm not going to be a twin any longer? I mean, I'm not going to be one of a twins? It won't change my name, too, will it?" (page 127)

Wilbur looks upon Merle's leaving as a funeral, and thinks there will be some kind of ceremony, like the funeral of little Georgie Finkboner a few months before.

It came to the Wilbur twin that these days until Saturday were like the days intervening in a house of death until the funeral. He became increasingly shy and uncomfortable. It seemed to him that his brother had passed on, as they said, his mortal remains to be disposed of on Saturday at three o'clock. Having led a good life he would go to heaven, where he would have a pony and a thousand knives if he wanted them. The strain in the house, the excitement of Winona, furtive weeping of Mrs. Penniman, the detached, uplifted manner of the chief figure, all confirmed him in this impression. Even Judge Penniman, who had been wont to speak of "them twins" now spoke of "that boy", meaning but the Wilbur twin.

He had no doubt there would be a ceremony--all the Whipples arriving in their own Sunday clothes, maybe the preacher coming with them; and they would sit silently in the parlour the way they did at the Finkboner house, and maybe the preacher would talk, and maybe they would sing or pray or something, and then they would take Merle away. He was not to be blamed for this happily inaccurate picture; he was justified

by the behaviour of Winona and her mother. And he was not going to be there. He wouldn't exactly run away; he felt a morbid wish to watch the thing if he could be apart from it; but he was going to be apart. He remembered too well the scene at the Finkboner house--and the smell of tuberoses. Winona had unaccustomed flowers in the parlour now--not tuberoses, but almost as bad. (pages 133-134)

Hundreds of other instances of character portrayal might be quoted, and many other characters could be mentioned. For, as Bergson says,

Every comic character is a type. Inversely, every resemblance to a type has something comic in it. (page 148)

But I feel that in the preceding examples we have studied the most important types, around which other characters may be grouped. This idea is also further explained by Bergson.

A remarkable instinct impels the comic poet, once he has elaborated his central character, to cause other characters, displaying the same general traits, to revolve as satellites round him. (page 164)

The following passage from Bergson, gives us the real secret of the humor gained by Wilson through characterization.

The comic character always errs through obstinacy of mind or of disposition, through absentmindedness, in short, through automatism. At the root of the comic there is a sort of rigidity which compels its victims to keep strictly to one path, to follow it straight along, to shut their ears and refuse to listen. In Molière's plays how many comic scenes can be reduced to this simple type; a character following up his one idea, and continually recurring to it in spite of incessant interruptions! (pages 184-185)

How many of Wilson's characters we could name who have done this very thing--Bunker Bean, Rufus Billop, Merton Gill, Professor Copplestone, Ruggles, Dave Cowan, Bertrand Meigs, Metzeger, and many others! But in the passages which have been quoted, we have already seen for what each of these is to be remembered. And now we must pass on to the study of Humor in Situation.

### Chapter III

#### Humor in Situation

Bergson says, "The comedy of situation is akin to the comedy of character." This statement proves very true in the study of Wilson. Many of the same devices are used in gaining humor of situation which are used for humor of characterization.

According to Bergson,

Any arrangement of acts and events is comic which gives us, in a single combination, the illusion of life and the distinct impression of a mechanical arrangement. . . .  
(page 69)

Comedy is a game, a game that imitates life. . . . (pages 68-69)

The comic is that side of a person which reveals his likeness to a thing, that aspect of human events which, through its peculiar inelasticity, conveys the impression of pure mechanism, of automatism, of movement without life. . . . (page 87)

Comedy combines events so as to introduce mechanism into the outer forms of life. (page 88)

We have already noticed how very natural and true to life are the characters in Wilson's novels. When we study his plots, we find that they are correspondingly filled with natural, every-day situations. This adds to the humor of his work, for, as Bergson says,

When a certain comic effect has its

origin in a certain cause, the more natural we regard the cause to be, the more comic shall we find the effect. (page 12)

One method by which Wilson gains humor of situation, as of characterization, is by the introduction of children, and their various pranks. We have noticed before that he is a thorough student of child nature, and seems to understand their ways. I shall give a few examples of this type of humor.

Prudence, the little Mormon girl, proves herself quite a problem to those who are taking care of her.

Thus, when she chose to call her largest and least sightly doll the Holy Ghost, the ingenuity of those about her was taxed to rebuke her in ways that would be effective without being harsh. It was felt, too, that her offence had been but slightly mitigated when she called the same doll, thereafter, "Thou son of perdition and shedder of innocent blood." Not until this disfigured effigy became Bishop Wright, and the remaining dolls his more or less disobedient wives, was it felt that she had approached even remotely the plausible and the decorous. (The Lions of the Lord, page 306)

We find many instances of humor furnished by the Cowan twins and Patricia Whipple. We have already examined some passages describing the little episode in the cemetery. Very laughable is the situation created when they begin to read the epitaphs on the tombstones. Patricia Whipple gives the twins a very stirring account of the time when she tried to kidnap the Wadley baby, and a little later a gypsy baby. Equally

humorous and perhaps even more characteristic of these three children is the scene where they decide to cut and bury Patricia's hair, so that she can really represent Ben Blunt, the hero about whom she has read.

They had a knife. It was Wilbur's, but Merle quite naturally took it from him and assumed charge of the ensuing operation. Wilbur Cowan had to stand by with no place to put his hands--a mere onlooker. Yet it was his practical mind that divised the method at last adopted, for the early efforts of his brother to sever the braid evoked squeals of pain from the patient. At Wilbur's suggestion she was backed up to the fence and the braid brought against a board, where it could be severed strand by strand. It was not neatly done, but it seemed to suffice. When the cap was once more adjusted, rather far back on the shorn head, even the cynical Wilbur had to concede that the effect was not bad. The severed braid, a bow of yellow ribbon at the end, now engaged the notice of its late owner.

"The officers of the law might trace me by it," she said, "so we must foil them."

"Tie a stone to it and sink it in the river," urged Wilbur.

"Hide it in those bushes," suggested Merle.

But the girl was inspired by her surroundings.

"Bury it!" she ordered.

The simple interment was performed.  
(The Wrong Twin, page 20)

Then we have the amusing incident when the time approaches for the Whipples to come to take Merle away, and Winona sends Wilbur in to dress for the occasion. He has no intention of being present, but

in trying to escape he encounters difficulties. He first stumbles against a bucket of whitewash, and then sprawls into a heap of soft coal.

Another humorous situation created by Wilson is Bunker Bean's first smoke. A few lines from this description will give the effect.

Then he coughed rather alarmingly. But that was to be expected. He drew in another breath of the stuff and coughed again. It was an honest cough; no doubt about that. Perhaps Gramper's cough had been honest. Perhaps the pipe he had selected was Gramper's own pipe, the one that made coughs. He became conscious of something more than throaty discomfort. Tiny beads of sweat bejewelled his brow, the lilac bush began to revolve swiftly about him. He must have taken Gramper's pipe after all--the one that led to lumbago. From revolving with a mere horizontal motion the lilacs now began also to whirl vertically. He had eaten a great deal at dinner. (pages 21-22)

In Wilson's novels we find many situations in which the humor is due to the reaction shown by certain characters to conditions which have arisen. This is sometimes given in a description by Wilson, and in other cases we can see the reaction by studying the speech of the individual. Rufus Billop is a good illustration of this when he is out riding in his new car with Aunt Beulah. The car is his most prized possession.

"She must steer easy," said Aunt Beulah. "I bet I could drive her as

easy as the little bus. Maybe some afternoon--"

Alarmed mother instinct thrilled every fiber of the car's owner.

He quickly broke in, "Oh, I wouldn't ask you to drive her, Aunt Beulah; but Claude will take you everywhere you want to go-- Claude will be right here." What he meant was that, if Aunt Beulah made it necessary, Claude would sleep in the car and have his meals brought to him. (Oh, Doctor!, page 257)

Old Mr. Gashwiler, Merton's employer, is a typical country store-keeper. He is rather a strict old man, as shown by his reactions to a request from Merton. Merton feels that he must see his favorite movie star, Beulah Baxter, so he "had silenced old Gashwiler with the tale of a dying aunt in the distant city". Gashwiler, much displeased, said that she should have died nearer to Simsbury, or at least have chosen a time not so busy.

But Merton had held with dignity to the point; a dying aunt wasn't to be hustled about as to either time or place. She died when her time came--even on a Saturday night--and where she happened to be, though it were a hundred miles from some point more convenient to an utter stranger. (Merton of the Movies, page 25)

One of the few humorous situations in The Lions of the Lord arises when Brigham Young, who has announced that with the help of the Lord he can perform miracles, is asked to demonstrate. Joel Rae, having absolute faith in Brigham's power, when he sees a young Indian boy who has lost an arm, takes him to Brigham and asks him to restore the arm. The situation is met in an interesting manner. Brigham says,

"Is it better for this poor creature to continue with his one arm here for the twenty-three years the world is to endure, and then pass on to eternity where he will have his two arms forever; or, do you want me to renew his arm now and let him go through eternity a freak, a monstrosity? Do you want him to suffer a little inconvenience these few days he has here, or do you want him to go through an endless hereafter with three arms?"

They have a difficult time, however, persuading the Indians that to have three arms would be a bad thing to do. To them, it would be very pleasing to be different, and have three arms. Later, Brigham Young makes a suggestion to Joel Rae.

"Brother Rae, it ain't just the best plan in the world to come on a man sudden that way for so downright a miracle. A man can't be always fired up with the Holy Ghost, with all the cares of this train on his mind. You come and have a private talk with me beforehand after this, when you got a miracle you want done."

When Ruggles takes Cousin Egbert in charge and has him properly outfitted and well groomed, the description of the scene in the barber shop, and Cousin Egbert's reactions, is good.

. . .during his hour in the barber's chair he did not once rebel openly. Only at times would he roll his eyes to mine in dumb appeal. There was in them something of the utter confiding helplessness I had noted in the eyes of an old setter at Chaynes-Wotten when I had been called upon to assist the undergardner in chloroforming him. I mean to say, the dog had jolly well known something terrible was being done to him, yet his eyes seemed to say he knew it must be all

for the best and that he trusted us. It was this look I caught as I gave directions about the trimming of the hair, and especially when I directed that something radical should be done to the long, grayish moustache that fell to either side of his chin in the form of a horeshoe. I myself was puzzled by this difficulty, but the barber solved it rather neatly, I thought, after a whispered consultation with me. He snipped a bit off each end and then stoutly waxed the whole affair until the ends stood stiffly out with distinct military implications. I shall never forget, and indeed I was not a little touched by the look of quivering anguish in the eyes of my client when he first beheld this novel effect. (page 34)

The change in Cousin Egbert's looks has a very humorous effect upon certain ones of his acquaintances.

. . . I caught their amazed stares, and then terrifically they broke into gales of laughter. The cub threw himself on a couch, waving his feet in the air, and holding his middle as if he'd suffered a sudden acute dyspepsia, while the elder threw his head back and shrieked hysterically. Cousin Egbert merely glared at them and, endeavoring to stroke his moustache, succeeded in unwaxing one side of it so that it once more hung limply down his chin, whereat they renewed their boorishness. The elder Floud was now quite dangerously purple, and the cub on the couch was shrieking.  
(page 38)

When Wilbur becomes infatuated with Pearl, the blonde, and thinks he is engaged to her, her light, careless attitude is rather amusing.

"It's been like a dream," he managed at last. "Just like a dream! Now you belong to me, don't you?"

"Sure, if you want to put it that way," said Pearl. "Come on! there's the music again."

At the door she was taken from him by the audacious mill foreman. Wilbur was chilled. Pearl had instantly recovered her public, or ballroom, manner. Could it be that she had not been rightly uplifted by the greatness of their moment? Did she realize all it would mean to them? But she was meltingly tender when at last they swayed in the waltz to "Home, Sweet Home". And it was he who bore her off under the witching moon to the side entrance of the Mansion. They lingered a moment in the protecting shadows. Pearl was chatty--not sufficiently impressed, it seemed to him, with the sweet gravity of the crisis.

"We're engaged now," he reminded her. Pearl laughed lightly.

"Have it your own way, kid! Wha'd you say your name was?" (The Wrong Twin, pages 222-223)

A laughable situation is created in the following passage, which explains itself fully enough.

Five blocks down Geneseo Street Starling had turned out to permit the passing of Trimble Cushman's loaded dray--and he had inexplicably, terribly, kept on turning out when there was no longer need for it. Frozen with horror, helpless in the fell clutch of circumstance, he sat inert and beheld himself guide the new bus over the sidewalk and through the neat white picket fence of the Dodwell place. It demolished one entire panel of this, made deep progress over a stretch of soft lawn, and came at last. . . to a grinding stop in a circular bed of pansies that would never be the same again. There was commotion within the bus. Wildeyed faces peered from the polished windows. A second later, in the speech of a bystander, "she was sweating passengers at every pore!"

Then came a full-throated scream of terror from the meraced house, and there in the doorway, clad in a bed gown, but

erect and defiant, was the person of long-bedridden Grandma Dodwell herself. She brandished her lace cap at Starling Tucker and threatened to have him in jail if there was any law left in the land. Excited citizens gathered to the scene, for the picket fence had not succumbed without protest, and the crash had carried well. Even more than at the plight of Starling, they marvelled at the miracle that had been wrought upon the aged sufferer--her that hadn't put foot to floor in twenty years. There were outcries of alarm and amazement, . . . but above them all rose clear-toned, vigorous denunciation from the outraged owner of the late pansy bed, who now issued from the doorway, walked unsupported down the neat steps, and started with firm strides for the offender. Starling Tucker beheld her approach, and to him, as to others there assembled, it was as if the dead walked. He climbed swiftly down upon the opposite side of his juggernaut, pushed a silent way through the crowd, and strode rapidly back to town. Starling's walk had commonly been a loose-jointed swagger, his head up in challenge, as befitted a hero of manifold adventure with wild horses. He now walked head down with no swagger. (The Wrong Twin, pages 165-166)

In Wilson's novels are many humorous situations produced by a character who does not understand the customs of some new place where he is, and tries to compare them with those to which he has always been accustomed. In The Man from Home we find many illustrations of this. I have chosen two different conversations which will sufficiently explain themselves. They are both, of course, contrasting the customs of America with those of England.

"There are no great old families such as we have that go back and back to the Middle Ages. . . ."

"Well, I expect if they go back that far they might just as well sit down and

stay there. . . ." (page 111)

"But you have no leisure class."

The other regarded him with whimsical tolerance. "No leisure class? Say, Doc, you ought to have a look at our colored population." (page 110)

As in humor of characterization, so in that of situation, we find Ruggles of Red Gap one of our richest sources of material--especially when we are looking for references to customs. Ruggles worries a great deal about the lack of class distinction which he finds in America. He cannot become reconciled to the fact that he, only a valet, should be on an equal footing with Cousin Egbert.

I thought it only proper then to point out to him that there were certain differences in our walks of life which should be more or less denoted by his manner of addressing me. Among other things he should not address me as Mr. Ruggles, nor was it customary for a valet to eat at the same table with his master. He seemed much interested in these distinctions and thereupon addressed me as "Colonel", which was of course quite absurd, but this I could not make him see. Thereafter, I may say, that he called me impartially either "Colonel" or "Bill". It was a situation that I had never before been obliged to meet, and I found it trying in the extreme. He was a chap who seemed ready to pal up with anyone, and I could not but recall the strange assertion I had so often heard that in America one never knows who is one's superior. Fancy that! It would never do with us. (page 35)

It seems to be almost as hard for the Americans of the story to learn the English customs. The Mixer cannot realize that according to good English custom

she must not shake hands with a valet.

She embraced Mrs. Effie with an air of being about to strangle the woman; she affectionately wrung the hands of Cousin Egbert, and had grasped my own tightly before I could evade her, not having looked for that sort of thing.

"That's Gousin Egbert's man!" called Mrs. Effie. But even then the powerful creature would not release me until her daughter had called sharply, "Maw! Don't you hear? He's a man!" Nevertheless she gave my hand a parting shake before turning to the others. (pages 96-97)

In another way Ruggles shows us that American customs differ greatly from English ones.

As to the gross ideals of the former tenant, I need only say that he had made, as I now learned, a window display of foods, quite after the matter of a draper's window: moulds of custard set in a row, flanked on either side by "pies", as the natives call their tarts, with perhaps a roast fowl or ham in the centre. Artistic vulgarity could of course go little beyond this, but almost as offensive were the abundant wall-placards pathetically remaining in place. (page 220)

Perhaps the most interesting and humorous description of this sort which Ruggles gives is that of the Honourable George's arrival at Red Cap, when he first comes from England.

One glance at the Honourable George served to confirm certain fears I had suffered regarding his appearance. Topped by a deer-stalking fore-and-aft cap in an inferior state of preservation, he wore the jacket of a lounge-suit, once possible, doubtless, but now demoded, and

a blazered golfing waist-coat, striking for its poisonous greens, trousers from an outing suit that I myself had discarded after it came to me, and boots of an entirely shocking character. Of his cravat I have not the heart to speak, but I may mention that all his garments were quite horrid with wrinkles and seemed to have been slept in repeatedly.

Cousin Egbert at once rushed forward to greet his guest, while I busied myself in receiving the hand-luggage, wishing to have our guest effaced from the scene and secluded, with all possible speed. There were three battered handbags, two rolls of travelling rugs, a stick-case, a dispatch case, a pair of binoculars, a hat-box, a top-coat, a storm-coat, a portfolio of correspondence materials, a camera, a medicine-case, some of these lacking either strap or handle. The attendants all emitted hearty sighs of relief when these articles had been deposited upon the platform. . . . At last, observing me, he came forward, but halted on surveying the luggage, and screamed hoarsely to the last attendant who was now boarding the train. The latter vanished, but reappeared, as the train moved off, with two more articles, a vacuum night-flask and a tin of charcoal biscuits, the absence of which had been swiftly detected by their owner.

It was at that moment that one of the loungers nearby made a peculiar observation. "Gee!" said he to a native beside him, "it must take an awful lot of trouble to be an Englishman." At the moment this seemed to me to be pregnant with meaning, though doubtless it was because I had so long been a resident of the North American wilds.

Much of the humor in The Spenders is derived from a mistaken conception of the Westerners concerning the East. The following conversation arises among

three of the main characters, two from the East and the other from the West. The Easterners are now on their way home from Montana.

"Oldaker", said Shepler, "has really been the worst sufferer. This is his first trip West."

"Beg pardon, Shepler! I was west as far as Buffalo--let me see--in 1878 or '79."

"Dear me! is that so?" queried Uncle Peter. "I got East as fur as Cheyenne that same year. We nearly run into each other, didn't we?" (page 72)

Mrs. Bines, perhaps, has as difficult a time as anyone in understanding the ways of the East.

"I hear they do have dreadful times with help in New York," said Mrs. Bines.

"Don't let that bother you, ma," her son reassured her. "We'll go to the Hightower Hotel, first. You remember you and pa were there when it first opened. It's twice as large now, and we'll take a suite, have our meals served privately, our own servants provided by the hotel, and you won't have a thing to worry you. . . ."

"I almost dread it," his mother rejoined. "I never did see how they kept track of all the help in that hotel, and if it's twice as monstrous now, how ever do they do it--and have the beds all made every day and the meals always on time?" (The Spenders, page 130)

In many instances Wilson produces humorous situations through the misrepresentation of something by certain characters, sometimes by some story that is told, and again by a mere action. For an example of

the latter we have the description of Sharon Whipple's greeting to Wilbur Cowan upon his return from the war.

It became Sharon's pretense that he was not hugging the boy, merely feeling the muscles in his shoulders and back to see if he were as good a lightweight as ever. He pounded and thumped and punched and even made as if to wrestle with the returned soldier, laughing awkwardly through it; but his florid face had paled with the excitement. (The Wrong Twin, page 317)

One of Wilson's best examples of misrepresentation is in The Spenders. In order to decline an invitation of Mr. Highbee, Percival uses for his excuse the supposed ill-health of his mother. Mrs. Bines, who is really in excellent health, but always takes everything literally, objects to the statements made, and almost causes an embarrassing situation.

Percival beamed upon him with moist eyes.

"By Jove, Mr. Higbee! that's clever of you--it's royal. Sis and I would like nothing better--but you see my poor mother here is almost down with nervous prostration and we've got to hurry her to New York without an hour's delay to consult a specialist. We're afraid"--he glanced anxiously at the astounded Mrs. Bines, and lowered his voice--"we're afraid she may not be with us long."

"Why, Percival," began Mrs. Bines, dazedly, "you was just saying--"

"Now don't fly all to pieces, ma! --take it easy--you're with friends, be sure of that. You needn't beg us to go on. You know we wouldn't think of stopping when it may mean life or death to you.

You see just the way she is," he continued to the sympathetic Higbee--"we're afraid she may collapse any moment. So we must wait for another time; but I'll tell you what you do; go get Mrs. Higbee and your traps and come let us put you up to New York. We've got lots of room--run along now--and we'll have some of that ham, 'the kind you have always bought', for lunch. A. L. Jackson is a miserable cook, too, if I don't know the truth."

Gently urging Higbee through the door, he stifled a systematic inquiry into the details of Mrs. Bine's affliction.

"Come along quick! I'll go help you and we'll have Mrs. Higbee back before the train starts." (pages 141-142)

Closely akin to misrepresentation is a device used by Wilson which we might call humorous misunderstanding. The former is a misunderstanding willfully planned by some character, while the latter is a mistaken idea, accidental or unplanned. The Wrong Twin presents a case of this kind in the two passages describing the stray dog which the Cowan Twins adopted and named Frank.

Soon after this the other notable event transpired. Frank, the dog, became the proud but worried mother of five puppies, all multicoloured like himself. . . . (page 147)

He was an arch sentimentalist and had followed a career of determined motherhood, bringing into the world litter after litter of puppies, exhibiting all the strains then current in Newbern. He had surveyed each new family with pride--families revealing tinges of setter, Airdale, Newfoundland, pointer, collie--with the hopeful air of saying that a dog never knew what he could do until he tried. (page 270)

A humorous situation is created by a mistake which Miss Hicks tells of making while nursing her second case.

"She was such a nice old thing; and she'd talk to me by the hour about what a good man he was, and show me little keepsakes he'd left. She fairly worshiped them. She was moving to the country and I was helping pack up the things she'd take, and there was an air pillow she seemed to like, blown up, you know; so, thinking she'd want it along, I let the air out and put it on the top of the trunk tray. Pretty soon her maid came in. She was a haggard old thing with kind of a teary face, anyway, and when she saw the pillow all flat where I'd put it she gave a shriek and began to sob all over the room and wring her hands. I wondered what awful thing I'd done, and when this Hester could finally talk I found out--and it was awful. The pillow had been blown up by the woman's husband about a month before he went, and that was one of the keepsakes--this pillow full of his actual breath; and there I'd gone and let it out like common air! Wasn't that dreadful? And this Hester was still sobbing--she couldn't think of anything except to hide the pillow--so I took it and simply blew it up again as good as new for all the poor old lady would know. Hester looked at me kind of hopeful and said maybe it would do. 'Of course it won't ever be the same,' she says--still sniffing, mind you--'but perhaps missus will go into her own grave without ever knowing.' 'She certainly will,' I told her, 'if you can manage to keep it to yourself.' Wasn't she the limit? Of course, it wasn't the husband's breath, but it wouldn't hurt her to keep on thinking it was." (Oh, Doctor!, pages 267-268)

Another method used by Wilson for gaining humorous effects, and occurring perhaps as often as any, is that of making his character express absurd ideas of different kinds. Sometimes these are expressed in conversation or short dialogue, and sometimes

one person gives his views at great length. In some cases the humor is principally in the situation, created, and in others it lies in the wit of the speaker. The latter we find in The Man from Home, when the American appears at the top of a hill, yoked with a donkey, and pulling up a heavy load. When asked by the Englishman why he chose the donkey for company, he retorts that he has picked the best company in sight.

Merton Gill spends much of his time practicing for the movies, with the hope that some day he will be accepted. In this particular instance we find him mounted upon Dexter, old Mr. Gashwiler's horse. Dexter has never had such an experience before, and does not fully approve of it. Merton feels that everything is not just as it should be.

"You--you better lead him out," suggested the rider. "I can feel him tremble already. He--he might break down under me." (page 43)

Aunt Sena, while caring for Rufus Billop, tries many different kinds of foods. She is always open to suggestions, and ready to test out anything new. She has used Excelsior charcoal wafers, pre-digested foods, and uncooked vegetables, and then--

A year later she discovered the health-giving properties of clean river sand, a teaspoonful of which she administered to the patient, according to directions, once each

week. The patient continued docile under this new treatment, but the results were not such as had been promised by the advertisement. Aunt Sena then combined electric vibrations with the river sand and other uncooked food. (Oh, Doctor!, page 20)

Sharon Whipple is rather amusing when he buys his new car, and is absolutely helpless when something goes wrong with it.

"Maybe we ought to"---began Sharon, but broke off his speech with a hearty cough. He was embarrassed, because he had been on the point of suggesting that they call Doc Mumford. Doc Mumford was the veterinary. The old man withdrew. Elihu Titus appeared dimly in the background. (The Wrong Twin, page 163)

Cousin Egbert has some very absurd ideas and does many ridiculous things. In the following passage we find one of his queer ideas. Ruggles is speaking.

Only upon reaching our destination did my companion brighten a bit. For a fare of five francs forty centimes he gave the driver a ten-franc piece and waited for no change.

"I always get around them that way," he said with an expression of the brightest cunning. "She used to have the laugh on me because I got so much counterfeit money handed to me. Now I don't take any change at all."

"Yes, sir," I said. "Quite right, sir."  
(page 28)

Poor Cousin Egbert cannot become reconciled to all the new ideas the other members of his family have acquired in Europe.

The following day was a busy one, for there were many boxes to be packed against the morrow's sailing, and much shopping to do for Cousin Egbert, although he was much against this.

"It's all nonsense," he insisted, "her saying all that truck helps to 'finish' me. Look at me! I've been in Europe darned near four months and I can't see that I'm a lick more finished than when I left Red Gap. Of course it may show on me so other people can see it, but I don't believe it does, at that." (pages 83-84)

One of the most humorous situations occurring in Ruggles of Red Gap is at the time when Cousin Egbert takes Ruggles to the lawn fê<sup>te</sup> of Judge Ballard, and introduces him as "Colonel Ruggles". The supposed officer takes the people by storm, and dances with the élite of Red Gap. When the article appears in the paper, telling of his arrival in Red Gap, his high social standing in England, and so forth, the Flouds and the Belknap-Jacksons are horrified, and feel that they are disgraced forever, because to them he is simply a man-servant. As usual, Cousin Egbert, can understand none of their feeling. He exclaims:

"Shucks! What's all the fuss? Just because I took Bill out and give him a good time! Didn't you say yourself in that there very piece that he'd impart to coming functions an air of smartness like they have all over Europe? Didn't you write them very words? And ain't he already done it the very first night he gets here, right at that there lawn-feet where I took him? What for do you jump on me then? I took him and he done it; he done it good. Bill's a born mixer. Why, he had all them North Side society dames stung the minute I flashed him; after him quicker than hell could scorch a feather; run out from under their hats to get introduced to him--and now you all turn on me

like a passel of starved wolves." (page 143)

As a result of this unusual mix-up, poor Ruggles feels very much unsettled and out of place, as we see in his speech which follows.

My hump was due, I made no doubt, first to my precarious position in the wilderness, but more than that to my anomalous social position, for it seemed to me now that I was neither fish nor fowl. I was no longer a gentleman's man--the familiar boundaries of that office had been swept away; on the other hand, I was most emphatically not the gentleman I had set myself up to be, and I was weary of the pretence. (page 138)

Once when Ruggles hears Cousin Egbert singing doleful songs, it proves almost too much for him. His desire for London as he describes it seems very queer to us.

Now, for example, while life seemed all too black to me, he sang a favorite of his, the pathetic ballad of two small children evidently begging in a business thoroughfare:

"Lone and weary through the streets  
we wander,  
For we have no place to lay our  
head;  
Not a friend is left on earth to  
shelter us,  
For both our parents now are  
dead."

It was a fair crumpler in my then mood. It made me wish to be out of North America--made me long for London; London with a yellow fog and its greasy pavements, where one knew what to apprehend. (pages 127-128)

Perhaps one of the largest groups of humorous situations in Wilson's novels is that created by the humorous description of the event. Sometimes they are told by one of the characters, sometimes in

conversation, and sometimes by Wilson himself. Into this group fall a good many examples which cannot be otherwise classified, thus making it seem unusually large.

In The Boss of Little Arcady we find a description which is very effective. The scene is the ladies' club in Little Arcady, and Miss Caroline, a newcomer in the town, has just announced that she always considered Shakespeare an overrated man.

The ladies gulped down chicken salad, many of them using forks with black thread tied about them to show they were borrowed from Mrs. Eubanks. They drank lemonade from a fine glass pitcher that had come as a gratuitous mark of esteem from the tea merchant patronized by the hostess; and they congealed themselves pleasantly with vanilla ice-cream eaten from dishes of excellent pressed glass that had come one by one as the Robinson family consumed its baking powder. (page 213)

The following description shows how Mrs. Potts had diligently pursued her occupation of enlightening the citizens of Little Arcady in a literary way.

This was after the town had been cleanly canvassed for two monthly magazines--one of which had a dress-pattern in each number to be cut out on the dotted line--and after our heroine had gallantly returned to the charge with a rather heavy "Handbook of Science for the Home",--a book costing two dollars and fifty cents and treating of many matters, such as, how to conduct electrical experiments in a drawing-room, how to cleanse linen of ink-stains, how the world was made, who invented gun-powder, and how to restore the drowned. (page 346)

The next passage from Professor How Could

You!, humorous because of the character's manner of description, is a speech of Mrs. Gale, whom the Professor meets on the Free Auto Camp Grounds. She has been telling of her very great hardships, and the way she deserted her husband. When Professor Coplestone is aghast to think she would do such a thing, she continues to defend herself.

"Listen again, Mr. Simms. I married while yet in my teens, a schoolgirl romance that lasted till the next day, when I got kicked by a cow I was milking. On the day I quit, the best dress I had was still my wedding dress. My wedding ring actually wore through, and he took what was left and sold it to the jeweler. I never did have another till I bought the one I'm wearing because it looks queer for a woman with children to be without one. I was worked to skin and bones, and this insect--he's a believer in infant damnation--would keep the children from school to slave in the fields. Judson Gale would also tell me I was no longer the woman I had been. Well, now I'm the woman I was, though of course I am not in the first blush of youth, and all because I left in a cool manner, as you call it. Say, if I hadn't left, people long ago would have been saying he was too mean to give me a headstone.  
(page 184)

Wilson is somewhat familiar with animal life, as well as being a student of human character, as we learn by the following description of Merton's attempt to saddle Dexter for a picture.

Not once in all his years had he been saddled. He was used to having things loose around his waist. The girth went still tighter. Dexter glanced about with genuine concern. Someone was intending to harm him. He curved his swanlike neck and snapped savagely at the shoulder of his aggressor, who kicked him again in the side and yelled,

"Who, there, dang you!"

Dexter subsided. He saw it was no use. Whatever queer thing they meant to do to him would be done despite all his resistance. Still his alarm had caused him to hold up his head now. He was looking much more like a horse. (Merton of the Movies, page 40)

Miss Hicks considers the three old guardians of Rufus Billop a bore, and does not always conceal her feelings as we see during this visit of Mr. Clinch, who has been flattering her.

He turned to peer humorously at the man in bed. Behind him Miss Hicks once more that day behaved regrettably with her face. She drew down the corners of her mouth, plumped out her cheeks, wrinkled her nostrils, and scowled above half-submerged eyes. Mr. Clinch detected a swift look of concern in the eyes of Rufus Billop and turned quickly about to Miss Hicks, who faced him with a flattered smile. (Oh, Doctor!, page 174)

The Wrong Twin is rich in descriptive passages. One of the best of these is that describing the preparation and starting of the Whipple family and the Cowan twins for church. I shall give only parts of the passage, for it is much too long to quote as a whole.

In the Penniman home it was not merely Sunday morning; it was Sabbath morning. Throughout the house a subdued bustling, decorous and solemn; a hushed, religious hurry of preparation for church. In the bathroom Judge Penniman shaved his marbled countenance with tender solicitude, fitting himself to adorn a sanctuary. In other rooms Mrs. Penniman and Winona arrayed themselves in choice

raiment for behoof of the godly; in each were hurried steppings, as from closet to mirror; shrill whisperings of silken drapery as it fell into place. In the parlour the Merle twin sat reading an instructive book. With unfailing rectitude he had been the first to don Sabbath garments, and lacked merely his shoes, which were being burnished by his brother in the more informal atmosphere of the woodshed, to which the Sabbath strain of preparation did not penetrate. . . .

Within five blocks from home and still five blocks from the edifice of worship, while Merle appeared as one born to Sunday clothes and shined shoes and a new hat, the Wilbur twin would be one to whom Sabbath finery was exotic and unwelcome. The flawless luster of his shoes would be dulled, even though he walked sedately the safe sidewalk; his broad collar and blue polka-dotted cravat would be awry, one stocking would be down, his jacket yawning, all his magnificence seeming unconquerably alien. . . .

The judge descended the stairs, monumental in black frock coat, gray trousers, and the lately polished shoes that were like shining relief maps of a hill country. He carried a lustrous silk hat, which he now paused to make more lustrous, his fingers clutching a sleeve of his coat and pulling it down to make a brush. The hat was the only item of the judge's regal attire of which the Wilbur twin was honestly envious--it was so beautiful, so splendid, so remote. He had never even dared to touch it. He could have been left in the room with it, and still would have surveyed it in all respect from a proper distance.

Mrs. Penniman came next, rustling in black silk and under a flowered hat that Winona secretly felt to be quite too girlish. Then Winona from the door of her room above called to the twins, and they ascended the stairway for a last rite before the start for church, the bestowal of

perfume upon each. Winona stood in the door of her room, as each Sunday she stood at this crisis, the cut-glass perfume bottle in hand. The twins solemnly approached her, and upon the white handkerchief of each she briefly inverted the bottle. The scent enveloped them delectably as the handkerchiefs were replaced in the upper left pockets, folded corners protruding correctly. As Wilbur turned away Winona swiftly moistened a finger tip in the precious stuff and drew it across the pale brow of Merle. It was a furtive tribute to his inherent social superiority.

Winona, in her own silk--not black, but hardly less severe--and in a hat less girlish than her mother's, rustled down the stairs after them. Speech was brief and low-toned among the elders, as befitted the high moment. The twins were solemnly silent. Amid the funeral gloom, broken only by a hushed word or two from Winona or her mother, the judge completed his fond stroking of the luminous hat, raised it slowly, and with both hands adjusted it to his pale curls. Then he took up his gold-headed ebony cane and stepped from the dusk of the parlour into the light of day, walking uprightly in the pride of fine raiment and conscious dignity. Mrs. Penniman walked at his side, not unconscious herself of the impressive mien of her consort.

Followed Winona and Merle, the latter bearing her hymn book and at some pains keeping step with his companion. Behind them trailed the Wilbur twin, resolving, as was his weekly rule, to keep himself neat through church and Sunday-school--yet knowing in his heart it could not be done. Already he could feel his hair stiffening as the coating of soap dried upon it. Pretty soon the shining surface would crack and disorder ensue. What was the use? As he walked carefully now he inhaled rich scent from the group--Winona's perfume combining but somehow not blending with a pungent, almost vivid, aroma of moth balls from the judge's frock coat. (pages 75-79)

Similar to the passage just quoted is the description of the excitement which reigns in the Penniman household at the time when Merle is to be taken

away by the Whipples.

By two o'clock of the momentous Saturday afternoon the tension was at its highest. Merle, dressed in his Sunday clothes, trod squeakily in the new shoes, which were button shoes surpassing in elegance any he had hitherto worn. As Dave Cowan had remarked, they were as good shoes as Whipple money would ever buy him. And the new hat, firm of line and rich in texture, a hat such as no boy could possibly wear except on Sunday, unless he were a very rich boy, reposed on the centre table in the parlour. Winona, flushed and tightly dressed, nervously altered the arrangement of chairs in the parlour, or remembered some belonging of the deceased that should go into the suitcase containing his freshly starched blouses. Mrs. Penniman, also flushed and tightly dressed, affected to busy herself likewise with minor preparations for the departure, but this chiefly afforded her opportunities for quiet weeping in secluded corners. After these moments of relief she would become elaborately cheerful, as if the occasion were festal. Even the judge grew nervous with anticipation. In his frock coat and striped gray trousers he walked heavily from room to room, comparing the clock with his watch, forgetting that he was not supposed to walk freely except with acute suffering. Merle chattered blithely about how he would come back to see them, with unfortunate effects upon Mrs. Penniman. (page 155)

Another scene of interest in the Penniman family is the cutting of Wilbur's hair by Judge Penniman.

At spaced intervals through the year Winona would give the order and the judge would complainingly make his preparations. The victim was taken to the woodshed and perched on a box which was set on a chair. The judge swathed him with one of Mrs. Penniman's aprons, crowding folds of it inside his neckband. Then with stern orders to hold his head still the rite was consummated with a pair of shears commandeered from plain and fancy dressmaking. Loath himself to

begin the work, the judge always came to feel, as it progressed, a fussy pride in his artistry; a pride never in the least justified by results. To Wilbur, after these ordeals, his own mirrored head was a strange and fearsome apparition, the ears appearing to have been too carelessly affixed and the scanty remainder of his hair left in furrows, with pallid scalp showing through. And there were always hairs down his neck, despite the apron. (page 151)

Wilson's art of description is well shown in the account of Wilbur's black eye, which he acquired in boxing.

The dreadful secret was revealed when he appeared for his supper one evening with a black eye. That is, it would have been known technically as a black eye--even Winona knew what to call it. Actually it was an eye of many colors, shading delicately from pale yellow at the edge to richest variegated purple at the centre. The eye itself--it was the right--was all but closed by the gorgeously puffed tissue surrounding it, and of no practical use to its owner. The still capable left eye, instead of revealing concern for this ignominy, gleamed a lively pride in its overwhelming completeness.

Another effective bit of description is found in the following short sentence.

He recovered a morsel of gum from beneath the room's one chair, put it again into commission, and spoke decisively. (pages 247-248)

We have noted before the amusing acts and speeches of Sharon Whipple. The description of his first attempt to drive his car is good.

With set jaws and a tight grip of the wheel he had backed from the stable, and was rendered nervous in the very beginning by the apparent mad resolve of the car to

continue backing long after it was wished not to. . . .

The next start was happier in results. Down the broad driveway Sharon had piloted the monster, and through the wide gate, though in a sudden shuddering wonder if it were really wide enough for his mount; then he had driven acceptably if jerkily along back streets for an exciting hour. It wasn't so bad, except once when he met a load of hay and emerged with frayed nerves from the ordeal of passing it; and he had been compelled to drive a long way until he could find space in which to turn round. . . .

When half the distance to the haven of the stable had been covered it betrayed symptoms of some obscure distress, coughing poignantly. Sharon pretended not to notice this. A dozen yards beyond it coughed again, feebly, plaintively, then it expired. There could be no doubt of its utter extinction. All was over. The end had come suddenly, almost painlessly. (pages 161-162)

Wilbur Cowan obtains permission from Sharon to take the engine apart, and spends three days in this occupation. When, on the end of the third day, he has all the parts reassembled, he decides to try putting in some more gasoline, and the car starts at once.

As with other types of humor, so with this one, we turn to Ruggles of Red Gap for many examples.

Mrs. Effie has asked Ruggles to take Cousin Egbert, and get him a complete new outfit, before they leave for America. He does, and takes Cousin Egbert for her to view the results, with which she is greatly pleased.

Hereupon Cousin Egbert, much embarrassed, leaned his stick against the wall; the stick fell, and in reaching down for it his hat fell, and in reaching for that he dropped his gloves; but I soon restored him to order and he was safely seated where he might be studied in further detail, especially as to his moustaches, which I had considered rather the supreme touch. (page 37)

At a tea given by Mrs. Effie an amusing situation occurs, through a blunder of Ruggles, who tells of the episode.

In spite of my aversion to the American wilderness, I felt a bit of professional pride in reflecting that my first day in this new service was about to end so auspiciously. Yet even in that moment, being as yet unfamiliar with the room's lesser furniture, I stumbled slightly against a hassock hid from me by the tray I carried. A cup of tea was lost, though my recovery was quick. Too late I observed that the hitherto self-effacing Cousin Egbert was in range of my clumsiness.

"There goes tea all over my new pants!" he said in a high, pained voice. (page 39)

Ruggles humorously describes another embarrassing situation which arises between him and the two Americans. The incident itself is funny, but the thing which makes it especially humorous is the very serious way in which he describes it.

Ruggles evidently has been drinking a little too much, although he does not think so. The three are invited into an art studio, where he is persuaded to don a cow-boy costume. He then falls asleep on the sofa, where he stays for some time. Cousin Egbert and

Jeff Tuttle are also drunk, but Ruggles does not seem to realize this. When they bring him home, we have the following description.

As we reached our own floor, one of them still seeming to support me on either side, they began loud and excited admonitions to me to be still, to come along as quickly as possible, to stop singing, and not to shoot. I mean to say, I was entirely quiet, I was coming along as quickly as they would let me, I had not sung, and did not wish to shoot, yet they persisted in making this loud ado over my supposed intoxication, aimlessly as I thought, until the door of the Floud drawing-room opened and Mrs. Effie appeared in the hallway. At this they redoubled their absurd violence with me, and by dint of tripping me they actually made it appear that I was scarce able to walk, nor do I imagine that the costume I wore was any testimonial to my sobriety. (page 72)

Another very humorous description is of the time when Ruggles becomes seasick, on the way to America, and his impatience with Cousin Egbert.

For three days I was at the mercy of the elements, and it was then I discovered a certain hardness in the nature of Cousin Egbert which I had not before suspected. It was only by speaking in the sharpest manner to him that I was able to secure the nursing my condition demanded. I made no doubt he would actually have left me to the care of a steward had I not been firm with him. I have known him to leave my bedside for an hour at a time when it seemed probable that I would pass away at any moment. And more than once, when I summoned him in the night to administer one of the remedies with which I had provided myself, or perhaps to question him if the ship were out of danger, he exhibited something very like irritation. Indeed he was never properly impressed by my suffering, and at times when he would answer my

call it was plain to be seen that he had been passing idle moments in the smoke-room or elsewhere, quite as if the situation were an ordinary one. (page 86)

Later on Ruggles is invited to a club meeting in Red Gap as one of the speakers, but the time is all taken up with gossiping.

This I discovered when I attended an afternoon meeting of the ladies' "Onward and Upwards Club", which, I had been told, would be devoted to a study of the English Lake poets, and where, it having been discovered that I read rather well, I had consented to favour the assembly with some of the more significant bits from these bards. The meeting, I regret to say, after a formal enough opening was diverted from its original purpose, the time being occupied in a quite heated discussion of a so-called "Dutch Supper" the Klondike person had given the evening before, the same having been attended, it seemed, by the husbands of at least three of those present, who had gone incognito, as it were. At no time during the ensuing two hours was there a moment that seemed opportune for the introduction of some of our noblest verse. (pages 158-159)

At least one other description should not be omitted from this group--that of the Honourable George after he has arrived from England.

I could not at first believe my eyes and was obliged to look again and again, but there could be no doubt about it; the Honourable George was wearing a single spat!

I cried out at this, pointing, I fancy, in a most undignified manner, so terrific had been the shock of it, and what was my amazement to hear him say: "But I had only one, you silly! How could I wear 'em both when the other was lost in that bally rabbit-hutch they put me in on shipboard? No bigger than a parcels-lift!" And he

had too plainly crossed North America in this shocking state! (page 235)

Another method which Wilson uses to gain humorous situations is the giving of two different interpretations to the same thing. Bergson says,

A situation is invariably comic when it belongs simultaneously to two altogether independent series of events and is capable of being interpreted in two entirely different meanings at the same time. (page 96)

An excellent example of this device is in The Spenders, when Percival Bines in no uncertain terms denounces Chicago to his mother and sister, and in almost the next breath praises it to Mr. Higbee.

"Lest my remarks have seemed indeterminate, madam," sternly continued Percival at the door of the car, "permit me to add that if Chicago were heaven I should at once enter upon a life of crime. Do not affect to misunderstand me, I beg of you. I should leave no avenue of salvation open to my precious soul. I should incur no risk of being numbered among the saved. I should be b-a-d, and I should sit up nights to invent new ways of evil. If I had any leisure left from being as wicked as I could be, I should devote it to teaching those I loved how to become abandoned. I should doubtless issue a pamphlet, 'How to Merit Perdition Without a Master. Learn to be Wicked in your Own Home in Ten Lessons. Instructions Sent Securely Sealed from Observation. Thousands of Testimonials from the Most Accomplished Reprobates of the Day'. I trust, Mrs. Llewellen Leffingwell-Thompson, that you will never again so far forget yourself as to utter that word "Chicago" in my presence. If you feel that you must give way to the evil impulse, go off by yourself and utter the name behind the protection of closed doors--where this innocent girl cannot hear you. Come, sister. Otherwise I may behave in a manner

to be regretted in my calmer moments. Let us leave the woman alone, now. Besides, I've got to go out and help the hands make up that New York train. You never can tell. Some horrible accident might happen to delay us here thirty minutes. Cheer up, ma; it's always darkest just before leaving Chicago, you know." (pages 138-159)

Just as Percival starts out the door, in comes Mr. Higbee, of Chicago, and Percival's ideas of Chicago are described differently.

"Ah! we were just speaking of Chicago as you came in," said Percival, blandly. "Isn't she a great old town, though--a wonder!" (page 140)

We find this device used to such an extreme as to make the situation absurd in Oh, Doctor!

Doctor Scobell, suggesting a young bond salesman to the expert Peck, was believing rain would fall before the day was out. At the same time he suspected that his confrère, Doctor Graff, might be correct in his opinion that the present perfect weather would continue for days. Doctor Graff conscientiously reaffirmed this opinion, but urbanely admitted that Doctor Scobell's views to the contrary were doubtless more soundly based than his. . . . (pages 63-64)

In the following passage from The Boss of Little Arcady we find the use of a double interpretation in a slightly different way.

"Boss of nothing!--that's all over. Cal, I've abdicated--I'm not even Boss of myself."

"Why, Solon--you can's possibly mean--"

"I do, though! Mrs. Potts is going to

marry me and--uh--put an end to everything!"  
(page 351)

This passage taken from Ruggles of Red Gap has a good play upon words. There are two very different interpretations given to the phrases, one by Ruggles and his friends, and the other by the Bohemian set.

Our piece having been announced as "Ghosts; a Drama for Thinking People", this part was entitled on their programme, "Gloats; a Dram for Drinking People", a transposition that should perhaps suffice to show the dreadful lengths to which they went. (pages 164-165)

One of our best examples of this type of thing is in The Wrong Twin, when the announcement appears of the marriage of Lyman Teaford and Pearl King. Lyman has for years been courting Winona Penniman, and Wilbur has just, as he thought, become engaged to Pearl. It is interesting to see how these two characters receive the news, which affects them both so vitally. They both seem to feel that the World War has been caused by this dreadful calamity.

It did not shock Wilbur Cowan that nations should plunge into another madness the very day after a certain fair one, mentioned in his meditations ad "My Pearl-- My Pearl of great price", and else--from the perfume label--"My Heart of Flowers", had revealed herself but a mortal woman with an eye for the good provider. It occasioned Winona not even mild surprise that the world should abandon itself to hideous war on the very day after Lyman

Teaford had wed beyond the purple. It was awful, yet somehow fitting. Anything less than a World War would have appeared inconsequent, anti-climatic, to these two so closely concerned in the preliminary catastrophe, and yet so reticent that neither ever knew the other's wound. Wilbur Cowan may have supposed that the entire Penniman family, Winona included, would rejoice that no more forever were they to hear the flute of Lyman Teaford. Certainly Winona never suspected that a mere boy had been desolated by woman's perfidy and Lyman's mad abandonment of all that people of the better sort most prize.  
(page 228)

Another method used by Wilson is that of changing from one situation to the direct opposite. Sometimes this takes only a short period of time, and sometimes longer. We find two good examples of this in the case of Sharon Whipple.

Then Sharon spoke of rumours that the new horseless carriage would soon do away with horses. He didn't believe the rumours, and he spoke scornfully of the new machines as contraptions. Still he had seen some specimens in Buffalo, and they might have something in them. They might be used in time in place of horse-drawn busses and ice wagons and drays. . . .  
(The Wrong Twin, page 154)

Sharon, the summer before, after stoutly affirming for two years that he would never have one of the noisy things on the place, even though the Whipple New Place now boasted two--bcasting like-wise of their speed and convenience--and even though Gideon Whipple jestingly called him a fossilized barnacle on the ship of progress, had secretly bought a motor car and secretly for three days taken instructions in its running from the city salesman who delivered it. His intention was to become daringly expert in its handling and flash upon the view

of the discomfited Gideon, who had not yet driven a car. (page 160)

Again we find the following about Sharon.

Sharon has grown modern with the town. Not so many years ago he scoffed at rumors of a telephone. He called it a contraption, and said it would be against the laws of God and common sense. Later he proscribed the horseless carriage as an impracticable toy. Of flying he had affirmed that the fools who tried it would deservedly break their necks, and he had gustily raged at the waste of a hundred and seventy-five acres of good pasture land when golf was talked.

Yet this very afternoon the inconsequent dotard had employed a telephone to summon his car to transport him to the links, and had denied even a glance of acknowledgment at the wonder floating above him. (page 4)

We have already noticed the change in Winona Penniman, from a very prim, modest person, who would not even dare to wear the silk hose given her, to one who daringly bought dancing slippers to match her hose, and gave cigarettes to the boys on the train, although she was a member of the anti-tobacco league. But there is another great change in her which has not been mentioned. She has always been very much aghast when she knew that Wilbur was taking boxing lessons, because to her this was one of the lowest possible occupations. But when Winona comes back from the War where she has been a nurse, she has married Spike Brennon, the prize-fighter who taught Wilbur to box.

In The Boss of Little Arcady Miss Caroline shows a great change in a very short time; She is from the South, and greatly enjoys Major Blake when she meets him, because she thinks he has been in the Southern army. When she finally discovers that she has been given a false impression by Clem, her servant, and that he is a Northerner, she becomes at once very cold and dignified.

In the case of Merton Gill, also, we see a complete change. At the opening of the story, he has high ambitions, but cannot seem to get into the movies at all. The story is an account of his attempts and failures, and at last he is successful. We leave Merton as a successful movie actor.

Again referring to Bergson, we find the following:

Sometimes the whole interest of a scene lies in one character playing a double part, the intervening speaker acting as a mere prism, so to speak, through which the dual personality is developed. (page 75)

In Wilson's work we have four outstanding examples of this, with perhaps other minor ones. Rufus Billop acts a double role, when he poses as an invalid, and insists on having a trained nurse, but throws out the medicine while she is out of the room. Even when he reaches the point where he is really anxious to get

well, he tries to hide the fact from Miss Hicks and Aunt Beulah, and appears to be still very weak and far from well.

One of the greatest sources of humor in Ruggles of Red Gap is the way in which Ruggles, an English valet, is brought to America and introduced as "Colonel Ruggles" by Cousin Egbert, and later, to eliminate social difficulties, is known by all Americans as being of noble birth. Many embarrassing situations are created by his trying to be himself and at the same time fulfil all requirements for his supposed nobility.

The keynote of the whole story of The Man from Home lies in the dual personality of the Honourable Almeric St. Aubyn, to whom Ethel Granger-Simpson becomes engaged. He poses as the son of the Earl of Hawcastle, but in the end they discover that he is not of noble birth at all.

Professor Coplestone is our very best example of this device, for throughout the entire book, Professor, How Could You!, humorous situations are created by the Professor representing something that he isn't. We find him representing the sign-bearer, Addison Simms of Seattle, the Indian Chief, the wild man of the Carnival, and other personalities in turn.

Once more quoting from Bergson,

One of the best-known examples (of

contemporary light comedy) consists in bringing a group of characters, act after act, into the most varied surroundings, so as to reproduce, under ever fresh circumstances, one and the same series of incidents or accidents more or less symmetrically identical. In several of Molière's plays we find one and the same arrangement of events repeated right through the comedy from beginning to end. (page 91)

Wilson's works are filled with examples of this. The Wrong Twin is a good illustration. The three Whipples, Sharon, Gideon, and Harvey D., become interested in the adoption of one of the Cowan twins. We see them having a solemn conference concerning the comparative worth of the two, and Merle is finally decided upon as the chosen one. Later in the story, we find them again in serious consultation about the disappointing way in which Merle has developed.

The Boss of Little Arcady presents three entirely distinct situations which have a strong similarity. First, Mrs. Potts comes to Little Arcady, and devotes her time to changing the citizens' ways of living. When they have finally become somewhat used to her, and consider her a part of the town, Miss Caroline comes from the South, and there is a great deal more readjustment necessary. Then, still later in the story, Little Miss comes to live in Little Arcady. These three arrivals are really the three big points in the plot of the story.

Two similar situations which arise in Ruggles of Red Gap are the coming of "Colonel Ruggles" to America, and later the coming of the Honourable George. In both cases Mrs. Effie and Mrs. Belknap-Jackson vie with each other for the first honor of entertaining the honored guest. The following conversation takes place after it has been decided that Ruggles must be represented as one of nobility.

"Perhaps," suggested his wife, "it might be as well if Colonel Ruggles were to come to us as a guest." She was regarding me with a gaze that was frankly speculative.

"Oh, not at all, not at all!" retorted Mrs. Effie crisply. "Having been announced as our house guest--never do in the world for him to go to you so soon. We must be careful in this. Later, perhaps, my dear."

"Naturally he will be asked about everywhere, and there'll be loads of entertaining to do in return."

"Of course," returned Mrs. Effie, "and I'd never think of putting it off on to you, dear, when we're wholly to blame for the awful thing."

"That's so thoughtful of you, dear," replied her friend coldly.

When it is discovered that the Honourable George is coming to America, the following conversation ensues.

"Of course we will be only too glad to put him up," said Mrs. Belknap-Jackson quickly.

"But, my dear, he will of course come to us first," put in Mrs. Effie. "Afterward, to be sure--"

"It's so important that he should receive a favourable impression," responded Mrs. Belknap-Jackson.

"That's exactly why--" Mrs. Effie came back with not a little obvious warmth. (page 217)

There are perhaps many other types of humorous situations in Wilson's novels which we could mention. Also, there are hundreds of others of the same types already discussed. But I have tried to choose characteristic passages, and those which would give enough of the story to make them interesting, as well as illustrative. By the study of these examples, we see that humor of situation is an important phase of Wilson's work.

## Chapter IV

### Verbal Sources of Humor

We have already made a study of Wilson's humor gained by characterization and by the creation of situations. But there still remains the greatest classification of all--his verbal sources of humor. Without this, Wilson's works would lose all their richness, and would become more like those of any humorous novelist; for it is his humor of phrase which is best-known to the average reader, and which distinguishes him from other writers. It is difficult in some cases to separate verbal humor from the other types, as we see by the following comment of Bergson.

The comic in words follows closely on the comic in situation and is finally merged, along with the latter, in the comic in character. Language only attains laughable results because it is a human product, modelled as exactly as possible on the forms of the human mind.  
(page 129)

As we study examples of Wilson's verbal humor, we are impressed with the way in which he adapts each humorous speech to the character by whom it is uttered. This accounts, of course, for the close relation between this chapter and the one on character-

ization. And often the situations which were described in the last chapter were made humorous largely by the language used in describing them. Bergson has also said,

A word is said to be comic when it makes us laugh at the person who utters it, and witty when it makes us laugh either at a third party or at ourselves. (page 104)

Before we have read a great deal of Wilson's work, we find that when speaking in his own person he is fond of using peculiar phraseology. This is illustrated by the names of many of his characters. Instead of speaking of Merle and Wilbur Cowan, as one ordinarily would, he usually refers to them as "the Merle twin" and "the Wilbur twin". Miss Montague, whom Merton meets at the Holden Studio, is repeatedly spoken of as "The Montague girl". In Bunker Bean we have "the Flapper" for whom no other name is given at all, and, in the same story, "Grandma, the Demon".

I have chosen several scattered examples of whimsical phrasing. Two rather good ones are found in the account of Merton's practice for the movies, when he borrows Mr. Gashwiler's old horse, Dexter.

"Well, I don't know," Merton hesitated. He was twenty-two years old, and he had never yet been aboard a horse. (page 41)

Merton finally succeeds in "boarding" Dexter, but does not stay long, as we learn in the next passage,

which gives us two striking phrases.

Spruce Street was vacant of Dexter, but up Elm Street, slowly cropping the wayside herbage as he went, was undoubtedly Merton's good old pal. He quickened his pace. Dexter seemed to divine his coming and broke into a kittenish gallop until he reached the Methodist Church. (page 53)

Oh, Doctor! presents another odd phrase.

Mr. Clinch restored the cigar to its corner crevice and beamed whimsy upon Mr. Peck. (page 4)

The following seemingly abbreviated phrase occurs in the introductory sentence of Lone Tree.

Back in the earlies Ben Carcross began to have trouble with his eyes. (page 3)

Perhaps one of Wilson's most apt descriptive phrases is found in The Wrong Twin.

But apparently now, while the secret was simple enough to tell--it took John McTavish hardly a score of burry words to tell it--it was less simple to demonstrate. (page 178)

In order to understand what Wilson means by "burry words", we must read the speech which John McTavish has just made.

"Yer-r-r old car-r-r-cass is muscle-bound, to be sur-r-e," conceded John. . . . "Ye've done gr-r-rand f'r-r a beginnerr-r." (page 178)

Another characteristic which is very noticeable in Wilson is the repetition of phrases which some character has used. Quite often in describing a situation Wilson uses to a certain extent the language of

the characters, thus preserving the atmosphere which has been created. Early in the story Oh, Doctor!, Rufus hears the phrase "Nature taking its course" used in connection with his father's undertaking business. Therefore the phrase has much meaning for Rufus, and Wilson himself uses it often, as in the following passages.

He was oppressed by the scent of flowers and by his lively imaginings of how--and when--Nature would take its course with him, Rufus Billop. . . .  
(page 24)

It was on such days that his mind crept back to the Billop industry in all its sinister phrases--to his father and Uncle George, who helped Nature to take its course. . . .  
(page 28)

It was during one of these absences that Nature took its course with Uncle George Billop. (page 33)

Lone Tree furnishes many examples of phrases used by characters in the story, then repeated by Wilson in his explanations. For example, he speaks of the priceless daffodils, the baby just bedded, being stacked at the bottom of a canyon, a young squirt of a doctor, the specialist's do-funnies, and the handkerchiefs' which his wife has made him bring--a shower and a blower.

In Oh, Doctor!, we find the following:

He did take an egg, faintly boiled, as Aunt Beulah put it. . . . (page 46)

Let us notice one more example of this class, taken from The Wrong Twin.

Lyman, in the speech of Newbern, had for eighteen years been going with Winona. But as the romantically impatient and sometimes a bit snappish Mrs. Penniman would say, he had never gone far. (page 173)

Both in his own person and in the speech of his characters, Wilson depends upon picturesque humor. He is very fond of using similes and metaphors in his descriptions. Oh, Doctor! is especially rich in passages of this kind. The following picture is given of Mr. Peck, one of the three guardians of Rufus Billop.

He held an overcoat across his thin knees and on it his soft black hat. Superior to all tricks of distraction, he merely stared ahead of him through half-shut lids and seemed to listen. He was like an elderly bird, drooping but still vigilant. (page 2)

All three of these old men have quite a tendency to flatter, and Miss Hicks is often their victim. From the following examples, we see that they usually speak in figurative language. The first two speeches are by Mr. McIntosh, and they are all speaking of Miss Hicks.

"There, my dear, we're glad you came, even if we get no more than a look at your bonny self to press like a rose between the leaves of our musty old memories--worn, well-thumbed volumes, as you can well--" . . . (page 357)

"What more natural? demanded Mr. McIntosh. "I told ye all! Inebriated he is by that dewy wild rose that's clutched her tendrils about his withered carcass all unbeknownst. He's taking notice at last. . . ." (page 162)

"That little arctic sunbeam!" This was Mr. Clinch; not venomous, but bland with secret knowledge. . . . (page 260)

"Well put," conceded Mr. Peck. "She's as beautiful as--as an actress." He considered he had gone to extremes in his praise. (page 170)

Miss Hicks, however, does not think of the three in such complimentary terms.

"I can't see it," she added; and then with deliberate, evenly spaced words, "That Mr. Clinch is the biggest fish unpickled. . . ." (page 232)

"If you ask me--" she injected a sort of genial venom into each word--"they're a nice, jolly old bunch of train robbers. . . ." (page 232)

"Big-hearted, those old freshes! That pernickety old Mr. Peck--he's a pint of sorghum. Know what that is? It's a kind of sour molasses. And that other old smoothy--old scraggy-face--what's his name? McIntosh! And that Clinch with his big overhanging eyes! Oh, yes, they're all giving money away--jolly old philanthropists!" (page 234)

Rufus also thinks of Miss Hicks in figurative terms, but a different type from those of the three old men.

And she had aroused a memory which he was long in identifying. It was nebulous at first, leading him back along the sick years to an adventurous summer in the country when Aunt Sena first came. He had, unwatched, strayed to a highly unsanitary barnyard where a man in blue overalls

milked a cow that was chewing green corn-stalks. Then the memory led him back to Miss Hicks as she had bent above him. He had it now. Her breath--like warm new milk. (page 133)

During a conference which the three old men are having about Rufus, Mr. McIntosh says,

"And that's all he needs to be cured of; it's the things he ain't got that scare him to death--like the things that ain't there that scare a kid in the dark." (page 9)

Miss Hicks gives a humorous description of Rufus.

Miss Hicks in the next room had been overheard to tell Aunt Beulah: "He's so earnest when he gargles! It always sounds like a car coming in." (page 195)

Again, when describing the dancing ability of Mr. Clinch, Miss Hicks says:

"--exactly like dancing with one of those overstuffed armchairs." (page 212)

After Billop's auto accident, Mr. Peck calls Mr. Clinch over the telephone, and the latter says, in describing his excited conversation,

"The old boy's makin' a noise like a young chicken caught in a wire fence." (page 298)

There is one more good figure in Oh, Doctor! which we must not fail to notice. It is a description of Aunt Beulah's car, an old model, with which she had quite a bit of trouble.

A block farther the little bus sputtered, buckled strangely and expired, becom-

ing an island in mid-stream, about which an evil and clamorous current lapped threateningly. (page 45)

The following passage from The Spenders is short but quite descriptive.

"Eddie is about as lively as a dish of cold breakfastfood, but his wife is all right, all right." (page 508)

In The Boss of Little Arcady, the children have a serious disagreement while playing, and the one little girl in the crowd makes the following remark about the little boys.

"They are terrapin-buzzards! exclaimed my woman child, with deep conviction." (page 84)

I have chosen only two examples from Professor, How Could You!, for I think they are typical of the others in the book. In both quotations Professor Coplestone is describing the situation, and the other character is Sooner Jackson.

Observing this he offered to get me a bottle of milk, he having finished his own, but I declined, fearing it would look unbecoming of me to drink milk from a bottle in so public a place. He then suggested another beverage. "They got some of that near-beer down there too. I'll get you a bottle of that if you say so--though it's tame stuff, like kissing your Aunt Hester." . . . (page 85)

Whereupon he placed on the dresser-top some tins of sardines--fish's pups, he quaintly termed them. (page 102)

The following figures from The Wrong Twin are interesting.

"My shining stars!" murmured Sharon at this his first view of his car's more intimate devices. "She's got innards like a human, ain't she?" He instantly beheld a vision of the man in the front of the almanac whose envelope is neatly drawn back to reveal his complicated structure in behalf of the zodiacal symbols. (page 162)

When Merle Whipple becomes very radical during the War, and is a great disappointment to his family, Sharon Whipple expresses the situation rather well.

As old Sharon said, the Whipple chicken coop had hatched a gosling that wanted to swim in strange waters; but it was eventually decided that goslings were meant to swim and would one way or another find a pond. (page 240)

Dave Cowan strongly disapproves of Wilbur's settling down to work on the Whipple farm, and tells him so in no uncertain terms.

"You to fool round those Whipple farms-- I don't care if it is a big job with big money--it's playing with fire. Pretty soon you'll be as tight-fixed to a patch of soil as any yap that ever blew out the gas in a city hotel. You'll stick there and raise hogs en masse for free people that can take a trip when they happen to feel like it." (page 346)

Ruggles of Red Gap is also rich in figurative language. Ruggles quite humorously describes his feeling about America.

I think I had become resigned to the unending series of shocks that seemed to compose the daily life in North America. Few had been my peaceful hours since that fatal evening in Paris. And the shocks had become increasingly violent. When I tried to picture what the next might be I found myself shuddering. For the present, like

a stag that has eluded the hounds but hears their distant baying, I lay panting in momentary security, gathering breath for some new course. I mean to say, one couldn't tell what might happen next. Again and again I found myself coming all over frightened. (page 122)

Ruggles' description of the Honourable George's helplessness is very effective.

He is as good as lost when not properly looked after. In the ordinary affairs of life he is a simple, trusting, incompetent duffer, if ever there was one. Even in so rudimentary a matter as collar-studs he is like a storn-tossed mariner--I mean to say, like a chap in a boat on the ocean who doesn't know what sails to pull up nor how to steer the silly rudder. (page 22)

The following argument with the Honourable George has an uncommon figure of comparison.

He insisted the chap had made it all enormously clear; that those mathematical Johnnies never valued money for its own sake, and that we should presently be as right as two sparrows in a crate. (page 12)

The two passages which follow also contain figures rather unfamiliar to Americans. In the first, Ruggles is speaking of Mr. Belknap-Jackson, when he fell overboard into the water.

"Yes, sir; quite so, sir," I replied smoothly. "I'll have you right as rain in no time at all, sir," and started to conduct him off the dock. But now, having gone a little distance, he began to utter the most violent threats against the woods person, declaring, in fact, he would pull the fellow's nose. . . . (page 112)

"That girl had a hard time, all right,

but listen here--she's right as a church. She couldn't fool me a minute if she wasn't. (page 299)

In the study of Wilson's comparisons, we find several striking examples of badly mixed figures. The first we shall examine is taken from The Wrong Twin, and describes the situation when Starling Tucker drove the bus over the sidewalk and through the picket fence of the Dodwell place.

A second later, in the speech of a bystander, "she was sweating passengers at every pore!" (page 166)

The two following passages come from Ruggles of Red Gap. Jeff Tuttle is speaking of Ruggles' watch.

"I'll advance that much on it," he said, "but don't ask for another cent until I've had it thoroughly gone over by a plumber. It may have moths in it." (page 61)

Cousin Egbert sees a merry-go-round, and says:

"Say, Sour-dough, let's go over to the rodeo--they got some likely looking broncs over there." (page 63)

Closely related to the figurative language which Wilson uses so freely, are numerous analogies which he makes. The two illustrations which I have chosen are both taken from Ruggles of Red Gap, and in both Ruggles is the speaker. In the first one, he slightly confuses common events with historical ones.

"The Floods," she answered impressively, "were living in Red Gap before the spur track was ever run out to the canning factory-- and I guess you know what that means!" "Quite so, Madam," I suggested; and indeed, though it puzzled me a bit, it sounded rather tremendous, as meaning with us something like since the battle of Hastings. (page 91)

When Ruggles is planning his United States Grill, he and Cousin Egbert disagree on several points. The following passage gives some queer ideas of Ruggles, as well as a humorous analogy.

Cousin Egbert, I fear, was not properly impressed with my plan, for he looked longingly at the wall-placards, yet he made the most loyal pretense to this effect, even when I explained further that I should probably have no printed menu, which I have always regarded as the ultimate vulgarity in a place where there are any proper relations between patron and steward. He made one wistful, timid reference to the "Try Our Merchant's Lunch for 35 cents," after which he gave in entirely, particularly when I explained that ham and eggs in the best manner would be forthcoming at his order, even though no placard vaunted them or named their price. Advertising one's ability to serve ham and eggs, I pointed out to him, would be quite like advertising that one was a member of the Church of England. (page 221)

Wilson offers some rather good illustrations of play upon words. The following illustration from Oh, Doctor! is a typical example.

"I'm enduring pain," said Cleaver; "but let us be at the Latin."

"I feel pretty bad right across here," said his pupil, a tenderly questing hand at his left side.

"Ah, well--the Latin. A dead language for the dying," pursued Cleaver, with a toler-

ant smile for his own wit. (page 32)

The four passages which follow are in a different group from any yet quoted, and are hard to classify. The humor is due partially to the contents, but mainly to the striking phraseology of the characters. First is a quotation from The Lions of the Lord, a toast made just before the further migration of the Latter-Day Saints. There is a certain pathos mingled with the humor.

"Here's wishing that all the mobocrats of the nineteenth century were in the middle of the sea, in a stone canoe, with an iron paddle; that a shark would swallow the canoe, and the shark be thrust into the rethermost part of hell, with the door locked, the key lost, and a blind man looking for it!"  
(page 108)

In the next quotation, taken from the same book, Brigham Young, the leader, loses his temper while talking to one of the Gentiles.

"You are such a baby-calf that we would have to sugar your soap to coax you to wash yourself on Saturday night. Go home to your mammy, straight-away, and the sooner the better." (page 152)

Oh, Doctor! has the following interesting discussion on car troubles.

"You go to a garage with a sick car and the general practitioner in charge gives it a couple of looks and calls in a carburetor specialist; and he gives a couple of looks at twenty-five per and says it needs a battery specialist. He comes along and says, 'For God's sake call a differantial

specialist quick, because it's a serious case!' And before you know it they have a gear specialist and a brake specialist and they all decide it was a case of short circuit, and so a cub in overalls with grease on his face comes along with some pliers and gives a couple of twists and the old car breathes again. Of course, the cub would have found the trouble in the first place." (page 62)

The following quotation from Ruggles of Red Gap is describing the situation after Ruggles, Cousin Egbert, and Jeff Tuttle descend from the merry-go-round. Ruggles is the speaker.

In view of what was later most unjustly alleged of me, I think it as well to record now that, though I had partaken freely of the stimulants since our meeting with the Tuttle person, I was not intoxicated, nor until this moment had I even felt the slightest elation. Now, however, I did begin to feel conscious of a mild exhilaration, and to be aware that I was viewing the behaviour of my companions with a sort of superior but amused tolerance. I can account for this only by supposing that the swift revolutions of the carrousal had in some occult manner intensified or consummated, as one might say, the effect of my previous potations. I mean to say, the continued swirling about gave me a frothy feeling that was not unpleasant. (page 66)

The Lions of the Lord furnishes a type of humor different from any mentioned thus far. There is humor gained unconsciously in the strange names which the Mormons have for their leaders.

For, strangely enough, the two men, so unlike, were drawn closely together--Brigham Young, the broad-headed, square-chinned buttress of physical vitality, the full-blooded, clarion-voiced Lion of the Lord, self-contained, watchful,

radiating the power that men feel and obey without knowing why, and Joel Rae, of the long, narrow, delicately featured face, sensitive, nervous, glowing with a spiritual zeal, the Lute of the Holy Ghost, whose veins ran fire instead of blood. (page 97)

. . . The wagon in which she lay was to be taken across the river by Seth Wright,--for the moment no Wild Ram of the Mountains, but a soft-cooing dove of peace. (page 62)

All through Wilson's works, many of his characters use odd coinages, a feature which adds a great deal to the verbal humor. I have chosen illustrations of this from seven different books, which shows that it is a common characteristic of Wilson's style, and does not belong to only a few characters. However, Sharon Whipple, in The Wrong Twin, is very fond of this practice. He utters the first four speeches.

"You ain't altered a mite," he went on. "Little more peaked, mebber--kind of more mature or judgmatical or whatever you call it." . . ." (page 318)

"Ain't he the most languageous critter!" had been Sharon's words. . . . (page 189)

"He don't cotton to me. I guess I never buttered him up with praise any too much. His languageousness gets on me. . . ." (page 255)

"Calling from her room upstairs to fool you," warned Sharon. "Don't I know her flummiddles?" (page 356)

We have the next speech from Gideon Whipple, in the same book.

"--and he went back to carpentering week-days and preaching on the Lord's Day; and one time he fell off a roof and hit on his head, and after that he was outlandish-er than ever, and they had to look after him." (page 119)

Judge Fenniman strongly disapproves when Winona plans to go to the dance with Wilbur. He coins a very descriptive phrase.

"The idea of a mere chit like her goin' out to a place that's no better than a saloon, even if you do guzzle your drinks at a table--and in a dug-out dress!" (page 261)

Spike Brennon, in this book, says the following about the frogs in Germany.

"Will you look at 'em walk!" said Spike. "Just like an animal! Don't they ever learn to hop like regular gorfs?" (page 308)

The Boss of Little Arcady is not so rich in humor as most of Wilson's books; but we find a good coinage in a remark made by Clem, the colored servant.

Clem had once been a Baptist and it was true he was now a Methodist. He had told her that his new religion was distinguished from the old by being "dry religion." (pages 206-207)

Mrs. Bines, in The Spenders, furnishes a choice bit of this type of humor.

Two maids would be required, and madame would of course wish a butler--

Mrs. Bines looked helplessly at her son who had just entered.

"I think--we've--we've always did

our own buttlings," she faltered. (page 156)

The Lions of the Lord is another book which produces very little humor. However, the following is a good example of these odd coinages.

"Is there," asked Brigham, "a collision between us and the United States? No, we have not collashed--that is the word that sounds nearest to what I mean." (page 233)

In Merton of the Movies, the little woman at the gate in Hollywood uses this device in speaking of Cashwiler, Merton's former employer.

"And you say this Bughalter or Gigwater or whatever his name is will take you back into the store any time?". . . (page 62)

Again and again she urged him not to forget the address of Giggerholder or Gooshsuamp or whoever it might be that was holding a good job for him. (page 65)

Ruggles, when speaking of our western cowboys, uses peculiar terms.

It was an unsavory place, frequented only by cattle and horse persons, the proprietor being an abandoned character named Spilmer. (page 264)

. . . Accompanying him were Cousin Egbert, the Indian Tuttle, the cow-persons, Hank and Buck, and three or four others of the same rough stamp. (page 265)

At another time Ruggles coins quite a descriptive phrase.

To my astonishment I ate heartily, even in such raffish surroundings. In fact, I found myself pigging it with the rest of them. (page 55)

In much of Wilson's work we find slang used quite freely by his characters. I have chosen only a few of the most picturesque instances of this for our study at this time. A little later we shall study his use of slang from another point of view.

Sharon Whipple in The Wrong Twin is made more humorous by his use of slang. His expressions are usually rather original. He becomes a bit explosive when talking about Merle and his editorship of The New Dawn.

"Fudge! Fudge and double fudge! Scissors and white aprons! Prunes and apricots! No! That war won't be stopped by any magazine! Go on--fight your fool head off! Don't let any magazine keep you back!" (page 255)

When Sharon hears of Patricia's marriage to Wilbur Cowan, he seems rather dazed.

"I snum to goodness!" said the dazed Sharon. "The darned skeesicks!" . . .

"Scissors and white aprons!" said Sharon. "Of all things you wouldn't expect!" (page 357).

Lone Tree is filled with examples of picturesque slang. The thing which makes it so refreshing is its local tang. Ben Carcross is from a western ranch, and while he is in the hospital he thinks and speaks of everything in the ranch terminology. He uses such phrases as "the one-way trail for me", "side-lined and cross-hobbled", "high-tail it out", and many others of

the same type.

In Oh, Doctor!, another story of nurses and doctors, we find examples of this type of humor which are worth noticing. While the specialists are in examining Rufus, and the three old men are anxiously awaiting the result, Mr. Clinch makes this surprising remark.

"I'll say they take their time; I could have had that goofus all apart and put together again by now. . . ." (page 62)

"A man goes flooey in the bean, thinking about diseases," suggested Mr. Clinch helpfully. (page 66)

After the specialists' diagnosis, they attempt to tell what they have discovered. But Mr. Clinch becomes impatient with their many technical terms.

"Now we're getting down to the bottom of the barrel," said Mr. Clinch. (page 68)

Mr. Peck has a queer way of mentioning death, when he is speaking of Miss Schultz, Billop's first nurse.

"But she'll have him smelling grass roots in no time!" said Mr. Peck savagely. (page 81)

Oh, Doctor! gives us a very picturesque description of a circus, in the words of Rufus Billop's father.

"Well, then, here it's his birthday, and down to Madison Square Garden is the all-firedest, grandest, glitteringest, slam-bangest circus on earth, full of elephants

and tigers and giasticuteses and horse-back riders that stand up on 'em, and brass bands and monkeys and folks turning somersets right and left, and popcorn and lemonade-- just a glory of a wild time that won't hurt him a mite, and like as not perk him up."  
(page 12)

From Ruggles of Red Gap I have chosen just three passages illustrating the use of picturesque slang. The first two are remarks made by Cousin Egbert.

"And the Judge has certainly got a case on Mis' Kenner, so mebbly she asked him to drop in with any friend of his. She's got him bridle-wise and broke to all gaits. . . ." (page 287)

"What's the matter with having a drink?"

"Say, listen here! I wouldn't have to be blinded and backed into it," said Cousin Egbert, enigmatically, I thought, but as they sat down I, too, seated myself. (page 48)

The next illustration is taken from The Mixer.

"Run off to bed, Jackson!" she directed. "We're busy. I'm putting a nick in Sour-dough's bank roll."  
(page 107)

Of the passages in which Wilson has in some way secured verbal humor, a great many have characterization for one of their main elements. We can discover definite traits of speech which mark certain characters, making them especially humorous. The first group of passages of this kind is rather hard to

classify, and we find only one character who has the peculiarity shown in the first example. This is Percival Bines in The Spenders. He has the odd habit of pretending to forget his mother's name, and calling her by fictitious names. His mother cannot see the joke, and thinks that he is speaking in all seriousness. This worries her a great deal, and adds much to the humor of the story.

"Well, sis, here we are!" he began. "How fine you're looking! And how is Mrs. Throckmorton? Give her my love and ask her if she can be ready to start for the effete East in twenty minutes. . . ."

It was his habit to affect that he constantly forgot his mother's name. He had discovered years before that he was sometimes able thus to puzzle her momentarily. . . . (page 127)

"Never mind, Mrs. Cartwright," he called back to her--"oh, beg pardon--Bines? yes, yes, to be sure--well, never mind, Mrs. Brennings. We'll give you time to put your gloves and a bottle of horse-radish and a nail-file and hammer into that neat travelling-bag of yours. . . ." (page 128)

"The term, Mrs. Thorndike, was used in its social rather than its theological significance," replied her son, urbanly. . . . (page 137)

"Why doesn't a fire make its own escape, Mrs. Carstep-Jamwuddle?" . . . (page 264)

"Don't, I beg of you, Lady Ashmorton! The suggestion is extremely repugnant to me. . . ." (page 265)

"Really, Mrs. Wrangleberry, I blush

for you." (page 265)

Among the remarks which are especially humorous, and characteristic of a certain group, are speeches made by children. A study of a few of these impresses us with their naturalness, and shows that Wilson knows and understands children. Some of these passages are humorous because of the terms used, some because of the childish ideas expressed, and others because of the humorous conversation which is developed. The first group of quotations is taken from The Wrong Twin, possibly Wilson's richest book in passages of this sort.

"We better both go together at the same time. . . ." (page 6)

"I can take care of my own money for me. . . ." (page 40)

"He said he wouldn't of done what I done--"

"Did, dear!"

"--wouldn't of did what I did for twice the money. . . ." (page 69)

"I don't care!" This was more bravado from the urchin.

"Well, don't you care!" Julianna said it soothingly.

"I will, too, care!" retorted the urchin, betraying her sex. . . . (page 28)

"I smoked his pipe repeatedly."

"Repeatedly?"

"Well, I smoked it twice. That's

repeatedly, ain't it? I'd have done it more repeatedly, but Miss Murtree sneaked in and made a scene."

"Did you swallow the smoke through your nose?"

"I--I guess so. It tasted way down on my insides. . . ." (page 21)

Wilbur had heard the phrase "power of the press". He conceived that this was what the phrase meant--this pulling of the lever. (page 140)

The two speeches which follow were uttered by Patricia Whipple, a child given to long, rambling sentences.

"That's whom I am going to be. That's whom I am now--or just as soon as I change clothes with some unfortunate. It's in a book. 'Ben Blunt, the Newsboy; or, From Rags to Riches'. He run off because his cruel stepmother beat him black and blue, and he become a mere street urchin, though his father, Mr. Blunt, was a gentleman in good circumstances; and while he was a mere street urchin he sold papers and blacked boots, and he was an honest, manly lad and become adopted by a kind, rich old gentleman named Mr. Pettigrew, that he saved from a gang of rowdies that boded him no good, and was taken to his palatial mansion and given a kind home and a new suit of clothes and a good Christian education, and that's how he got from rags to riches. And I'm going to be it; I'm going to be a mere street urchin and do everything he did. . . ." (pages 12-13)

"And he's the father of the boy that I wore his clothes yesterday when I was running away, and the father of that other boy that was with him and that I'm going to have one of for my very own brother, because Harvey D. and grandpa said something of that kind would have to be done,

so what relation will that make us to this man that was so kind to you?" (page 101)

This conversation takes place while the twins are looking at tombstones.

He pointed to the rounded top of the stone where was graven a circle inclosing primitive eyes, a nose, and mouth. From the bottom of the circle on either side protruded wings.

Merle drew near to scan the device. He was able to divine that the intention of the artist had not been one of portraiture.

"That ain't either his picture," he said heatedly. "That's a cupid!"

"Ho, gee, gosh! Ain't cupids got legs? Where's its legs?"

"Then it's an angel."

"Angels are longer. I know now-- it's a goop. And here's some more reading." (page 8)

Little Prudence Rae in The Lions of the Lord utters some clever, characteristic speeches while playing with her dolls.

"But you're not my really papa-- he's went far off--oh, ten ninety miles far! . . ." (page 286)

"Perhaps you have some farming to do out at the barn, because my dollies can't be very well with you at a tea-party, because you are too much. . . ." (page 288)

"Here is the house, and here is a little door where to go in at. You must be very, very particul-yar when you go in. Now what shall we cook?" And she clasped her hands, looking up at him with

waiting eagerness.

He suggested cake and tea. But this answer proved to be wrong.

"Oh, no!"--there was scorn in her tones--"buffalo-hump and marrowbones and vebstulls and lemon-coffee." (page 288)

In The Boss of Little Arcady is a speech not only characteristic of the child uttering it, but helping to characterize Mrs. Potts.

"And she always says 'diddy-you' instead of 'dij-you', "broke in my name-sake, who, loitering near us, had overheard the name of Mrs. Potts. (page 197)

Our two following types of verbal humor which have a strong characterizing element are very closely related. The first is the use of rambling and incomplete sentences which characterize the speaker. We have already seen an example of this used by the child, Patricia Whipple. Almost closely enough related to be placed in the same class is the running together of words, phrases, and even sentences by a character.

Bunker Bean's Aunt Clara gives a splendid illustration of the rambling, incomplete sentence, in a letter to Bunker.

"If you turned your talents to the express business you might learn to manage it yourself because you always had a fine head for such things, and by owning a lot of their stock you could get the other stockholders to elect you to be one of their directors, which would be a fine occupation for you, not too hard work and plenty of time to read good books which I hope you find same

now of evenings in place of frittering away your time with associations of a questionable character, and ruining your health by late hours and other dissipation though I know you were always of good habits." (page 110-111)

I have chosen two examples from The Wrong Twin. The first is by Mrs. Penniman.

"And Ed Seaver had been to the barber shop to have his hair cut--he always gets it cut the fifteenth of each month--well, he found out all about it from Don Paley, that they'd had to send for to come to the Whipple New Place to cut it neatly off after the way it had been sawed off rough, and she told me word for word." (page 66)

The next example is taken from Winona Penniman's letter from the Front, in which she tells about the War, her new Parisian outfit, and Edward Brennon's blindness in almost the same breath.

"I had a week in Paris last month, and bought some clothes, a real Paris dress and things. You would not know me in the new outfit. The skirt is of rather a daring shortness, but such is the mode now, and I am told it becomes me. Poor Edward, he is so patient, except for spells when he seems to go mad with realizing his plight. He is still a man. His expression is forceful. He doesn't smoke, and warns me against it, though the few cigarettes I allow myself are a precious relief. But I have promised him to give up the habit when the war is over. He is a strong man, but helpless. He still believes I am the pretty thing he saw in the post office. The skirt is pleated, light summer stuff, and falls in a straight line. Of course I have the shoes and stockings that go with it." (pages 311-312)

The Montague girl in Merton of the Movies is

a good example of those characters who enunciate very poorly, running their words together. In the following passage she is talking to Merton.

"Well, I don't know. I done a Carmen-cita part in a dance-hall scene last month over to the Bigart, and right in the mi'st of the fight I get a glass of somethin' all over my gown that practically rooned it. I guess I rather do this refined cabaret stuff--at least you ain't so li'ble to roon a gown. Still and all, after you been warmin' the extra bench for a month one can't be choosy. Say, there's the princ'ples comin' on the set." (page 103)

Perhaps the most outstanding character using this mode of speech is Breede, the hard-headed business man in Bunker Bean. We have noted one of his speeches in the chapter on characterization, and here are several others typical of him.

"Have 'em ready in the morning," he directed, referring to the letters he had dictated. "G'wout 'n' 'muse yourself when you get time," he added hospitably. "Now I got to hobble to my room. If you see any women outside, tell 'em g'wan downstairs if they don't want to hear me." . . ."  
(pages 127-128)

"Seddown! View of efforts bein' made b' cert'n parties t's'cure 'trol of comp'ny by promise of creatin' stock script on div'dend basis, it is proper f'r d'rectors t' state policy has been-- . . ." (page 80)

"--to c'nserve investment rep'sented by this stock upon sound basis rather than th' spec'lative policy of larger an' fluc' chating div'dends yours ver' truly what time's 'at game called?" (page 81)

The method by which Wilson stamps his

characters most effectively is the use of characteristic phrases in their speech, which are repeated again and again. We find many characters who can be identified in this way, and a large number of them are in Ruggles of Red Gap.

Jeff Tuttle is known by such speeches as the following:

"Any friend of Sour-dough Floud's is all right with me," he assured me.  
"What's the matter with having a drink? . . ."  
(page 48)

"What's the matter with a little snack? . . ."  
(page 52)

"What's the matter with having just one little one before grub?" asked the Tuttle person as we joined him. He had a most curious fashion of speech. I mean to say, when he suggested anything whatsoever he invariably wished to know what might be the matter with it. . . . (page 54)

"What's the matter with a little drive to see some well-known objects of interest?"  
(page 55)

Cousin Egbert is always a more or less amusing character, and especially so when he repeatedly uses the rebellious phrase which we find in the following passages.

"Well, I guess I've got my rights as well as anybody," he insisted. "I'll be pushed just so far and no farther, not if I never get any more cultured than a jack-rabbit. And now you better go on and write or I'll be--dashed--if I'll ever wear another thing you tell me to. . . ."  
(page 45)

"Come right down to it," continued

Cousin Egbert, "I ain't afraid of hardly any person. I can be pushed just so far. . . ." (page 148)

"You can't tell what that bunch of crazies would be wanting you to do next thing with false whiskers and no right pants. I would tell them 'I can be pushed just so far, and now I will go out to the ranche with Sour-dough for some time, where things are nice.' . . ." (page 180)

I heard her coldly demand, "Where are your feet?" Whereupon the plaintive voice of Cousin Egbert arose to me, "Just below my legs." I mean to say, that he had taken the thing as a quiz in anatomy rather than as the rebuke it was meant to be. As I closed my door, I heard him add that he could be pushed just so far. (page 214)

The Honourable George's favorite remark is concerning the strangeness of everything American.

"I say," he remarked to Cousin Egbert, who was beaming fondly at him, "how strange it all is! It's quite foreign. . . ." (page 236)

"Marbles!" called the Honourable George to us; "why marbles? Silly things! It's all bally strange! And why do your villagers stare so? . . ." (page 237)

"Everything is so strange," he muttered again, quite helplessly. . . . (page 238)

"I mean to say names with hyphen marks in 'em--I'd never heard the hyphen pronounced before, but everything is so strange. . . ." (page 242)

"Everything is so strange here," I heard him saying as I passed their table, and the woman echoed, "Everything!" while her glance enveloped him with a curious effect of appraisal. (page 255)

Ruggles himself uses more identifying phrases than any of the other characters in the book. We shall take several of his characteristic phrases, and notice a few examples of each. A fact which adds to the humor of these is that so often he does not have exactly the right interpretation himself. In the two following passages, we feel that his interpretation of the phrase is rather hazy.

I mean to say, almost quite everyone stared. Rather more like a parade it was than I could have wished, but I was again resolved to be a dead sportsman.  
. . . (page 152)

Even one of my competitors showed himself to be a dead sport by coming to me from time to time with hints and advice.  
(page 227)

Ruggles is always mentioning whether or not persons or things really matter.

--I could but speculate unquietly as to what sort of place the Red Gap must be. A residential town for gentlemen and families, I had understood, with a little colony of people that really mattered, as I had gathered from Mrs. Effie. . . . (page 123)

There were actually tradesmen who seemed to matter enormously; on the other hand, there were those of undoubted qualifications, like Mrs. Pettengill, for example, and Cousin Egbert, who deliberately chose not to matter, and mingled as freely with the Bohemian set as they did with the county families. . . .  
(page 156)

There we are born to our stations and are not allowed to forget them. We matter from birth, or we do not matter, and that's all to it. . . . (page 170)

With a true insight I suddenly perceived that one might belong to the great lower middle-class in America and still matter in the truest, correctest sense of the term. . . . (page 202)

At this I again felt some misgiving, for I meant the United States Grill to possess an atmosphere of quiet refinement calculated to appeal to particular people that really mattered; and yet it was plain that, keeping a public house, I must be prepared to entertain agricultural laborers and members of the lower or working classes. . . . (page 211)

--I was obliged to admit that the Honourable George had too often shown a regrettable fondness for the society of persons that did not matter, especially females. . . . (page 259)

Sausages, to be sure, have their place, and beer as well, but sauerkraut I have never been able to regard as an at all possible food for persons that really matter. Germans, to be sure! . . . (page 285)

My task now was to see that the Grill was kept to the high level of its opening, both as a social ganglion, if one may use the term, and as a place to which the public would ever turn for food that mattered. (pages 259-260)

In order to appreciate the full significance of Ruggles' phraseology in the next group of passages, we must remember that he is an Englishman in America, and he is constantly contrasting American customs with those of his own country.

I will not say their women are without a gift for wearing gowns, and their chefs have unquestionably got at the inner meaning of food, but as a people at large they would never do with us. . . . (page 8)

I mean to say, they were people who could perhaps matter in their own wilds, but they would never do with us. . . . (page 9)

He was a chap who seemed ready to pal up with anyone, and I could not but recall the strange assertion I had so often heard that in America one never knows who is one's superior. Fancy that! It would never do with us. . . . (page 35)

Even her voice, a magnificently hoarse rumble, was primed with a sort of uncouth goodwill which one might accept in the States. Of course it would never do with us. . . . (page 96)

I could not wonder that our own travellers have always spoken so disparagingly of the American civilization. It is a country that would never do with us. . . . (page 123)

Equality in North America was indeed praiseworthy; I had already given it the full weight of my approval and meant to live by it. But at home, of course, that sort of thing would never do. (page 306)

There is a double humor in the next passage, which is a remark made by another character imitating Ruggles, followed by Ruggles' comment on it.

"How lovely!" exclaimed the mimic Oswald. "Perhaps he has broken both his legs so he can't run off any more," at which the fellow Hobbs remarked in his affected tones: "That sort of thing would never do with us."

This I learned aroused much laughter, the idea being that the remark had been one which I am supposed to make in private life, though I dare say I have never uttered anything remotely like it. (page 167)

A very common characteristic of Ruggles

is to say a thing then explain his meaning in other words.

"Some book Johnny says a chap is either a fool or a physician at forty," he remarked, drawing the blanket more closely about him.

"I should hardly rank you as a Harley Street consultant, sir," I swiftly retorted, which was slanging him enormously because he had turned forty. I mean to say there was but one thing he could take me as meaning him to be, since at forty I considered him no physician. But at least I had not been too blunt, the touch about the Harley Street consultant being rather neat, I thought, yet not too subtle for him.  
(page 16)

The next is said by Ruggles, concerning Cousin Egbert.

I trust it will be remembered that in reporting this person's speeches I am making an earnest effort to set them down word for word in all their terrific peculiarities. I mean to say, I would not be held accountable for his phrasing, and if I corrected his speech, as of course the tendency is, our identities might become confused. I hope this will be understood when I report him as saying things in ways one doesn't word them. I mean to say that it should not be thought that I would say them in this way if it chanced that I were saying the same things in my proper person. I fancy this should now be plain. (Pages 24-25)

That we created a sensation, especially along the commercial streets, where my host halted at shops to order goods, cannot be denied. Furore is perhaps the word. I mean to say, almost quite everyone stared. . . . (page 152)

Such was the Mixer. That sort of thing would never do with us, and yet I suddenly saw that she, like Cousin Egbert,

was strangely commendable and worthy. I mean to say, I no longer felt it was my part to set her right in any of the social niceties. . . . (page 200)

Now, I asked myself, would the going into trade of Colonel Marmaduke Ruggles be regarded by those who had been his social sponsors in Red Gap? I mean to say, would not Mrs. Effie and the Belknap-Jacksons feel that I had played them false? . . . (page 208)

"He's the human flivver. Put him in a car of dressed beef and he'd freeze it between here and Spokane. Yes, sir; you could cut his ear off and it wouldn't bleed. I ain't going to run the Judge against no such proposition like that." Of course the poor chap was speaking his own backwoods metaphor, as I am quite sure he would have been incapable of mutilating Belknap-Jackson, or even of imprisoning him in a goods van of beef. I mean to say, it was merely his way of speaking and was not to be taken at all literally. . . . (pages 230-231)

He seemed fascinated and yet unequal to a straight look at me. He was undoubtedly dazed, as I could discern from his absent manner of opening the tin of charcoal biscuits and munching one. I mean to say, it was too obviously a mere mechanical impulse. . . . (page 236)

Really she was quite fierce about it. I mean to say, the glitter in her eyes made me recall what Cousin Egbert had said of Mrs. Effie, her being quite entirely willing to take on a rattlesnake and give it the advantage of the first two assaults. . . . (page 298)

From staring at her rather absently I caught myself reflecting that she was one of the few women whose hair is always perfectly coiffed. I mean to say, no matter what the press of her occupation, it never goes here and there. . . . (page 301)

"So that's it?" she began, and almost could get no farther for mere sputtering. I mean to say, I had long recognized that she

possessed character, but never had I suspected that she would have so inadequate a control of her temper. (page 302)

In the following passage, Ruggles is talking of Ibsen.

(I may say in passing I have learned that the plays of this foreigner are largely concerned with people who have been queer at one time or another, so that one's parentage is often uncertain, though they always pay for it by going off in the head before the final curtain. I mean to say, there is too much neighborhood scandal in them!) (page 161)

All examples of repetition of phrase thus far cited have been taken from one book. Ruggles of Red Cap is not the only book which has this feature. In The Man from Home, Lady Creech, the governess, has one oddity of speech by which she is easily recognized.

"Don't mumble your words!" Lady Creech bent her ablest glare upon the offender.... (page 251)

"I tell you," responded the other, "I couldn't hear a thing they said, they mumbled their words so--dreadful persons! . . . ." (page 186)

"Yes, ma'am," said Pike patiently.

"And don't mumble your words if you expect me to listen to you," warned Lady Creech indignantly. . . . (page 226)

"Don't you see," prompted Lady Creech, almost pleadingly. "Don't you hear him? He didn't mumble his words." (page 299)

In the next three passages, taken from Oh,

Doctor!, the speech is at first uttered by Miss Hicks, and at last Rufus Billop has taken it up.

"Isn't that just like you?" she asked. She said it brightly, kindly, as if it were something to which his agreement was inevitable. . . . (page 234)

"Isn't that just like you!" demanded Miss Hicks. "I wish you'd stop it--or go get killed by something if you simply have to. . . ." (page 327)

He looked up at her with resignation.

"Isn't that just like you?"

This was a habit of speech with him since she had ceased to hide that she very much wished him to live; a most annoying habit, she thought. He was so glib about it, as if he had picked it up ready-made somewhere. (page 348)

We should notice one more example before leaving this type of humor. In Bunker Bean, much is made of the Flapper's "little old rag", as she calls her dress.

"I like you in that," confided the flapper with an approving glance. He wondered if she meant the hat, the cravat or America's very best suit for the money.

"I like you in that," he retorted with equal vagueness, at last stung to speech.

"Oh, this!" explained the flapper in pleased deprecation. "It's just a little old rag. . . ." (page 177)

It was horribly open and conspicuous, he felt; still, getting out of a car like that--and the flapper's little old rag was something that had to be looked at--he was drunk with it. . . . (page 178)

He pictured himself as a tired business man eating boiled eggs of a morning in a dining-room panelled with fumed oak, the flapper across the table in some little old rag. . . . (page 204)

Tuesday afternoon he had walked with the flapper in the park and had learned of many things going forward with solely his welfare in view--little old house surrounded on all sides by just perfectly scenery--little old next year's car--little old going-away rag--little old perfectly just knew it the first minute she saw him--little old new rags to be bought in Paris--and sister only going to Asheville on hers. (page 262)

Perhaps the way in which Wilson gains his most striking examples of verbal humor is by the use of incongruity. He gains this effect in several different ways, one of which is by having his characters use inappropriate terms, not fitted to the occasion. In Ruggles of Red Gap we find two good illustrations of this.

"He makes me wear these chest-protectors on my ankles," said Cousin Egbert bitterly, extending one foot. . . . (page 56)

The animals, being unladen, were fitted with a species of leather bracelet about their forefeet and allowed to stray at their will. (page 185)

Mrs. Bines, in The Spenders, occasionally uses terms which are entirely inappropriate. The following passage is an example of this.

-2- "Now, don't you find the Pompeian figurines exquisite?" he asked her. The poor creature, after looking around her helplessly

ly, declared that she did like them; but that she liked the California nectarines better--they were so much juicier."  
(page 279)

"Did you ever notice how she says i-ron the way people say it when they're reading poetry out loud? I'll bet, if he had her help, the author of 'One Hundred Common Error's could take an Argus and run his list up to a hundred and fifty in no time. She keeps finding common errors there that I'll bet this fellow never heard of. You mustn't say 'by the sweat of the brow', but 'by the perspiration'--perspiration is refined and sweat is coarse--." (page 348)

In this group of inappropriate phrases I am placing the next example simply for want of a better classification. The passage is taken from The Boss of Little Arcady.

"I tell you, my friend, it ain't doing this town one bit of good. The idea of a passel of strong, husky young men settin' around on porches in their white pants and calling it 'passing the summer'. I ain't never found time to pass any summers." (page 369)

Next let us examine a group of passages in which the speaker comments on some remark which has been made, thus showing his misunderstanding of the speech. First we shall look at those taken from Professor How Could You! The story is written in the first person, with Professor Coplestone speaking. Most of his quotations are taken from Sooner Jackson, with whom Professor Coplestone was thrown for a while, and at the end of each passage we have his own interpretation

and comment. In some places the Professor gives his definition of a word or phrase, and this definition of a word or phrase, and this definition is placed in brackets. In the first passage, Professor Coplestone is describing a college yell.

"Ah, you sheik!" I caught, or the interjection may have been "Oh"--incited doubtless by a rumor that I had braved certain dangers on the great American desert. As I turned to face the class a final tribute reached, "Is not he wondrous!" or "a wonder!" as the boyish phrase may have been, to be met by the fervent confirmation, this time quaintly varied to "I will tell the cock-eyed world that he is." (page 3)

In the next, the quotation is from the truck-driver with whom the Professor was riding at the time of the hold-up.

"This bozo is fast company all right," again said the wounded man. "He knocks off a couple of guys back there." I thought if he were referring to the gateposts he was wrong, as I had knocked off only one by reason of turning too sharply. (page 62)

In the next passage the person speaking is Harold, the Gambler.

"Is the old bird still up against it or has he made a killing?"

I instantly now perceived that it must be a fashion of speech among these men to refer to human beings as birds, but I was puzzled by the remainder of his speech. (page 92)

In the following passages, the person quoted is Sooner Jackson.

"Quit your kidding, old-timer," he crisply said; and added in a tone of not unkindly inquiry, "Things breaking rotten for you, too?"

Being uncertain of the import of this speech I asked, "Do you know the Rocky Mountains? . . ." (pages 79-80)

"When did you eat last?" I demanded.

Releasing my wrist he answered in a tone again light, "Yesterday morning at ten o'clock, by dalight squandering, I et the very last of a forty-dollar silver-mounted banjo with jeweled frets, but promise me you'll never tell a soul. I don't want to get talked about in a hick town like this." Such were his actual words, and I had no doubt that hunger had made the man delirious. . . . (pages 81-82)

Our car started and as we seated ourselves Mr. Jackson savagely remarked, "I should have soaked that bird a plenty when I had the chance."

"I dare say," I replied, not divining the precise meaning of his speech, but feeling its intention to be hostile. . . . (page 88)

"After a time, eh?" said the young man genially, and added, "Is the old bird still up against it or has he made a killing?"

I instantly now perceived that it must be a fashion of speech among these men to refer to human beings as birds, but I was puzzled by the remainder of his speech. However, the boy had an ingratiating manner, so I thought to satisfy him.

"I do not know," I answered, "what Mr. Jackson may be against, but in any event I doubt if he would resort to murder. It is true that he lately spoke of soaking a bird, but I do not think he would have gone to the extreme of killing him. He merely hustled

out with his tickets after I had given him some of my kale." . . ." (page 92)

"Now listen, Bill--" he was beginning; but I did not relish this sobriquet and resolved to confide in him moderately.

"I will," "I said, "as a mark of confidence, tell you that my Christian name is Algernon. . . ." (pages 97-98)

"I ask you to believe this on my word of honor as a British officer. But, meantime, I again ask you to listen while I try to get some sense into that run-about bean [quick mind] of yours." I saw he was serious, and, although even then I doubted him to be a British officer, I prepared to listen. . . . (page 98)

"I wouldn't put it past him to be here any minute with a couple of bulls [companions] to make a pinch. . . ." (page 98)

"All I want to do is to get you out of here before they nab you. So first I'm going to change that map for you."

I looked about, but could perceive no map in the apartment. "I mean your face," explained Mr. Jackson. . . . (page 99)

"Well, you old bonehead [one of strong character]: Didn't I tell you to say 'How, how?'. . ." (page 141)

Sooner led me within our tent, where he turned and said sternly, "I suppose you want and told that dame your life story, you poor fish [communicative person]. . . ." (page 165)

Sooner now glanced sharply at me, exclaiming, "Well, look who's here! You old he-soubrette [one of unusual histrionic gifts]. Who'd have thought it? . . ." (page 167)

"Turn around slow and let me lamp [admire] you once," he directed, and, as I obeyed, "Not so bad for a tryout. . . ." (page 169)

--"I've worked hard to save you from that, Al, and I take so much pride in my so-far success I don't want to see you queer it by some piece of old-woman blatting [a kind of fancy needlework]. What you really need is a keeper, someone kind but firm as granite. . . ." (page 170)

"The trouble with you, you poor sap [a gentleman], "he said at last as I stood hear him chewing my twig, "you can't be trusted away from someone capable of serious thought. I sometimes consider you to be the biggest fish unpickled [of a studious habit] when it comes to looking out for yourself. . . ." (pages 169-170)

--"I shall leave with her a sum of money ample for your chow [incidental expenses] and I trust you will give her as little trouble as possible. . . ." (page 171)

--"From time to time I shall write to this shrimp [business associate] giving news of my travels. . . ." (page 172)

"Oh, very well, cull [sir]!" replied the fellow, though sullenly, I thought. . . . (page 173)

"An hour and a half! What do you think of that? I sent that chore boy with a ten-spot to get small silver an hour and a half ago. And it's taken me all this time to get wise. I've been gypped [made impatient] in broad daylight. . . ." (page 229)

"It was certainly soft sugar for that butter-cup," she returned. "Wouldn't I like to swing once at him [overtake him]! . . ." (page 230)

"Where's Max?" she again demanded with a sharp look at me, and again before I could say that this person was unknown to me, she, with a characteristic swift change of manner, disclosed that she was dog-tired and would like to hit the good old hay [sit down a moment]. . . . (page 233)

"Some little wise-cracker [so-called Educator Cracker] yourself, ain't you, Jas? . . ." (page 250)

"We couldn't turn the poor old fluff [sap] loose--he's too helpless. Just a human blur [an unlucky guy]! . . ." (page 265)

"--Of course the poor fish [demented person] ought to be in some good booby-hatch [hoosegow] where the nut-sharps [alienists] could watch him, but that would take time." (page 148)

The Wrong Twin offers two excellent examples of misunderstood speeches.

"But, you know, the poor kid after all hasn't any form," the convalescent Merle announced to Patricia when they were seated.

"He has nice hair and teeth," said the girl, looking far ahead as the car moved off.

"Oh, hair--teeth!" murmured Merle, loftily careless, as one possessing hair and teeth of his own. "I'm talking about golf." (page 206)

Wilbur Cowan comes home with a black eye, which he says he received by "stepping into one of Spike Brennon's straight lefts".

Winona, conceiving that this talk was meant to describe an accident of the most innocent character, demanded further details; wishing to be told what a straight left was; why a person named Spike Brennon kept such things about; and how Wilbur had been so careless as to step into one. She instinctively pictured a straight left to be something like an open door into which the victim had stepped in the dark. (page 191)

In Oh, Doctor!, Rufus Billop harbors a very humorous misimpression.

Indeed, they would already be protesting against his choice of a chauffeur notoriously unsafe--one that broke speed laws, one that had in his mania demolished a handsome limousine containing elks. He idly wondered why elks were taken to picnics and taken in limousines. Young ones, doubtless. (page 242)

Our next group of quotations with their misinterpretations comes from Ruggles of Red Gap, which is very rich in this type of humor. We must remember that Ruggles, an Englishman, tells the story in the first person. When he is talking of the Honorable George, it is interesting to notice how he complains about the American use of "guess" while he himself uses "fancy" in the same way.

"I fancy you're quite right. And the chap 'guesses' when he awfully well knows, too. That's the essential rabbit. To-night he said 'I guess I've got you beaten to a pulp', when I fancy he wasn't guessing at all. I mean to say, I swear he knew it perfectly." (pages 16-17)

The one to whom Ruggles usually refers in the remaining speeches is Cousin Egbert.

"Some eats, Bill!" he called to me. "I got to hand it to you," though what precisely it was he wished to hand me I never ascertained, for the Mixer at that moment claimed my attention with a compliment of her own. . . . (pages 254-255)

"And say, listen here, that guy is all right if anybody should ask you. You talk about your mixers!"

This was a bit puzzling, for of course

I had never "talked about my mixers". I shouldn't a bit know how to go on. . . .  
(page 283)

The tea was astonishingly excellent, so few Americans I had observed having the faintest notion of the real meaning of tea, and I was offered with it bread and butter and a genuinely satisfying compote of plums of which my hostess confessed herself the fabricator, having, as she quaintly phrased the thing, "put it up". . . . (page 172)

And I can fancy that this very human trait of his had in a manner worn upon the probably undisciplined nerves of the backwoods josser--had, in fact, deprived him of his "goat", as the native people have it. . . . (page 110)

I also overheard the Senator tell him that I had got his sheep, whatever that may have meant--a sheep or a goat--some domestic animal. . . . (page 87)

"How is the Judge this morning?" he broke in.

"The Judge, sir?" I was a loss, until he gestured toward the room of the Honourable George.

"The Judge, yes. Ain't he a justice of the peace or something?"

"But no, sir; not at all, sir."

"Then what do you call him 'Honourable' for, if he ain't a judge or something? . . ." (page 26)

"I can be pushed just so far," he curiously warned me, "and no farther--not by any man that wears hair."

"Yes, sir," I said again, wondering what the wearing of hair might mean to this process of pushing him, and feeling rather absurdly glad that my own face is smoothly shaven. . . . (page 27)

"There's more than one way to skin a cat," he added as we ascended to the Floud's drawing-room, though why his mind should have flown to this brutal sport, if it be a sport, was quite beyond me. (page 28)

Jeff Tuttle says:

"That woman can bite through nails. But here's your drink, Sour-dough. Maybe it will cheer you up."

Extraordinary! I mean to say, biting through nails. (pages 48-49)

Once more we hear the Honourable George.

"Jolly chaps; with no swank," he insisted. "We drove quite almost everywhere--waterworks, cemetery, sash-and-blind factory. You know I thought 'blindfactory' was some of their bally American slang for the shop of a chap who made eyeglasses and that sort of thing, but nothing of the kind. They saw up timbers there quite all over the place and nail them up again into articles. It's all quite foreign." (page 241)

In Professor How Could You! we find examples of a thing rather closely related to what we have just studied. Professor Coppelstone attempts to repeat slang phrases which he has heard. In some instances which we shall notice a little later, he becomes very free with them, and is not so particular. But at first he is very careful even in his enunciation, which gives a humorous effect.

The instant I was spied on the campus I heard an approving undergraduate shout of "That is a boy!" and with this cry I was freed of all misgiving due to the knowledge that a perversely garbled version of my wanderings had become current.  
. . . (page 2)

"Ain't he good, Ed?"

"I will say that he is," remarked Edward, who, it seemed, had somehow picked up a bit of our slang. (page 67)

In the following passage, Sooner Jackson is attempting to teach the Professor how to impersonate an Indian chief.

"And remember you don't know a word of English; all you can say of it is 'Ugh, ugh! Me heap big chief!' Go on, say it."

"Ugh, ugh," I repeated, "I am a heap big chieftain." (page 101)

Sooner Jackson tells Professor Coplestone that they are going to have a medicine show, and he has the following impression.

"A show of medicine" had somehow suggested merely the laden shelves of an apothecary, whereas I was to learn that it meant something vastly different in the racy vernacular of my companion. (page 104)

Presently, after slang becomes a regular element in Professor Coplestone's language, he always tries to do and say exactly the proper thing, with the result that he has a hopeless mixture. We could not begin to note all the examples of this, for the book is filled with them. I shall try to choose just a few of the most typical illustrations. In each case quoted the slang and by the Professor is something he has heard some other character say.

"Eureka!" I cried. "Why not address the hicks in a real language, yet one they could by no possibility comprehend? By doing this, by quoting remembered vigorous passages, I could infuse into them a warmth that would, with the unlearned, cause them to pass for supreme gazukus. . . ." (page 110)

Immediately the lounging groups before the shops began to stream toward us. From side streets to our left and right came other yaps or hicks. . . . (page 125)

We drove slowly the length of the main street, receiving the stares of hicks and yaps, and turned into a shaded avenue leading to the highway. . . . (page 152)

"If we could only," I said, "apprise those in control of some near-by booby-hatch --." But I was sternly gestured to silence. . . . (page 153)

"Madam," I replied, "I am not no professor, I am a plain gink or bimbo, as they are sometimes called, my name being Simms. . . ." (page 162)

In the presence of a lady I did not altogether relish this crude chaffing, so I retorted with rather an acid sarcasm, "I trust I have at least the instincts of a sap, and I dare say, even after your watchful care is withdrawn, I shall be able to conduct myself as one. . . ." (page 172)

"He is a diamond in the rough, madam," I replied--"one of Nature's true bums with a heart of gold; ungrammatical at times, yet always finely the sap. . . ." (page 174)

The poor bird still stared in feeble dismay at his watch, finally replacing it with a sigh. . . . (page 203)

I thought quickly. "I have a large wad of dough in small silver, madam," I said, "if I can be of service. . . ." (page 229)

"I am only a poor sap," I continued, "but if really bone-headed sincerity in wishing to rescue you from your present difficulty will be of any help--. . ."  
(page 251)

"I dare say we understand each other," I replied. "I haven't studied the ways of the underworld for nothing. I may not always be an acute egg, but I am sap enough to know when I meet another sap such as your wife is. . . ." (pages 237-238)

"My dear old sap," I urbanly said, "I was engaged in skinning Iowa prettily for some weeks before I met you and if I cannot go past with this neat hokum skit in one, then I am not the bonehead I have been reliably told I am. Stick around and catch my act tommorrow you poor fish!  
. . . ." (pages 249-250)

All in an instant I direly knew this-- the instant I glanced up to behold in the forefront of a new flock of eggs the vaucuous uneasily grinning map of that poor fish, Doctor Hemingway. Even as I blinked at this appalling spectacle there insinuated itself before him from the rear rank of sailors the incredible form and the vilely repulsive pan of none other than Bertrand Meigs. . . . (page 261)

"Listen, Bill," I said, "I ain't no professor nor never was. I am a pretty fast baby and a handy bimbo with firearms, and last night I knocked off a couple of guys back there. . . ." (pages 83-84)

This nettled me and I retorted with some spirit, "You may keep your vile insinuations to yourself, if you please, but it's all true. I knocked off a couple of guys and brought off Joe when they were about to put him in a hole and at this very moment, although I wear a bum or inferior suit, I have a number of dollars of kale in many of its pockets--pinned in so that I may

not be frisked except with difficulty."  
(page 84)

Let us now turn to a slightly different phase of misinterpretation--the Englishman's idea of our terminology. The examples of this will be taken largely from Ruggles of Red Gap, and I believe they are self-explanatory if we remember that Ruggles, the English butler in America, is the speaker.

"Three rousing cheers!" I said, having gathered the previous day that this was a popular American toast. . . . (page 81)

"It's very extraordinary, sir," I said, wondering if I oughtn't to cut off to the hotel and warn Mrs. Effie so that she might do a heated foot to him, as he had once expressed it. . . . (page 45)

"Some of them dead beats in the North Side set will put you sideways if you don't," warned the latter, but I held firmly to the line of quiet refinement which I had laid down, and explained that I could allow no such inconsiderate mention of money to be obtruded upon the notice of my guests. I would devise some subtler protective against the dead beet-roots. . . . (page 227)

Had I not given them the right to believe that I should continue, during my stay in their town, to be one whom their county families would consider rather a personage? . . . (page 208)

How different, I reflected, had been my own entrée into this county society! . . . (page 243)

I might be a living wire, as Cousin Egbert had said, but I was keenly aware that his overalls and hat would rather convey the impression that I was what they call in the States a bad person from a bitter creek. . . . (page 213)

Indeed, Cousin Egbert had been loudly arrogant in the matter, speaking largely of his European intimacy with the "Judge" until, as he confided to me, 'he had them all bisoned', or, I believe, "buffaloeed" is the term he used, referring to the big-game animal that has been swept from the American savannahs. . . . (page 232)

In the matter of music, however, I was pleased to accept the advice of Cousin Egbert. "Get one of them musical pianos that you put a nickel in," he counselled me, and this I did, together with an assorted repertoire of selections both classical and popular; the latter consisting chiefly of the ragging time songs to which the native Americans perform their folkdances. . . . (page 228)

"--I don't mind telling you I egged the coon on to do it."

I saw that she was referring to the black and his wife whom I had met at the New York camp, though it seemed quaint to me that they should be called "coons", which is, I take it, a diminutive for "raccoon", a species of ground game to be found in America. . . . (pages 204-205)

For my first luncheon the raccoons had prepared, under my direction, a steak-and-kidney pie, in addition to which I offered a thick soup and a pudding of high nutritive value. . . . (page 260)

His wife was to assist my raccoon cook in the kitchen. (page 245)

From one of the Pullman night coaches emerged the Honourable George, preceded by a blackamoor or raccoon bearing bags and bundles, and followed by another uniformed raccoon and a white guard, also bearing bags and bundles, and all betraying a marked anxiety. . . . (page 233)

As at the time of that most slanderous

minstrel performance, it was said that the Bohemian set had again, if I have caught the phrase, "put a thing over upon" the North Side set. . . . (page 292)

For two days we again filed through mountain gorges of a most awkward character, reaching Red Gap at dusk. For this I was rather grateful, not only because of my beard and the overalls, but on account of a hat of the most shocking description which Cousin Egbert had pressed upon me when my own deer-stalker was lost in a glen. I was willing to roughen it in all good-fellowship with these worthy Americans, but I knew that to those who had remarked my careful taste in dress my present appearance would seem almost a little singular. (pages 211-212)

The following quotation is from the newspaper clipping describing the arrival of Ruggles.

"It's somewhat a town--if I've caught your American slang," he said with a merry twinkle in his eyes. (page 140)

The character speaking to Ruggles in the next passage is Cousin Egbert.

"--He's up to a lawn-feet."

"A social function, sir?" I asked.

"No; just a lawn-feet up in Judge Ballard's front yard to raise money for new uniforms for the band--that's what the boy said in there." (page 132)

The Spenders also furnishes examples of this type of humor, two of which we shall examine. At a very formal banquet, a former elaborate dinner is being praised.

"And the orchestra," spoke up Mrs. Bines, who had read of the banquet, "played 'Hail to the Chef!'"

The laughter at this sally was all it should have been, even the host joining in it. Only two of those present knew that the good woman had been warned not to call "chef" "chief", as Silar Higbee did. (page 193)

Later in the story we have a French baron, who says:

"Ah, ha! very charmed, Mr. Bines and Miss Bines; it is of a long time that we are not encountered." (page 281)

Wilson has employed still another method of securing humor of the verbal type, and this is by the use of French. In The Spenders it is a Frenchman himself who uses it, and the humor arises from his attempt to translate it into English.

"Je ne donne pas un damn," he says to himself, and translates, as was his practice, to better his English--"I do not present a damn. I shall take what it is, that it may be." (page 173)

The next example, taken from The Man From Home, is a play on French and English pronunciation.

"--I shouldn't have to explain that in marrying into a noble family I bring my dot--my dowry--"

The young attorney from Kokomo had translated the tiny French word most unhappily. "Your--your douch? Money, you mean?"

Another illustration of the same type may

be found in The Wrong Twin.

He said the old house would now be turned into a saloon, or salong, as the French call it. (page 336)

The next few examples are taken from Ruggles of Red Gap, and show the crude pronunciation which the Americans give to the French.

"Say, Frank," he began, "Ally rest-orong," and this he supplemented with a crude but informing pantomime of one eating. . . . (page 52)

"Ally caffy!" directed the Tuttle person, and we were driven off, to the raised hats of the remaining cabmen, through many long, quiet streets. . . . (page 58)

"Ally caffy on the corner," directed the Tuttle person, and once more we were seated at an iron table with whisky and soda ordered. . . . (page 58)

"I'd get a thimbleful of elderberry wine or something about every second Friday, except when I'd duck out the side door of a church and find some daffy. Here, George, foomer, foomer--bring us some scegars, and then stay on that spot--I may want you. . . ." (page 49)

Inside the place was all activity, for many cabmen were now accepting the proffered hospitality, and calling "votry santy!" to their host, who seemed much pleased. . . . (page 54)

"Vooley-voos take something!" he demanded, and the cabman appeared to accept.

"Vooley-voos your friends take something, too?" he demanded further, with a gesture that embraced all the cabmen present, and these, too, appeared to

accept with the utmost cordiality.  
(page 54)

"Vooley-voos make-um bring dinner!"  
said the Tuttle person to the cabman,  
who thereupon spoke at length in his  
native tongue to the waiter. By this  
means we secured a soup that was not  
half bad and presently a stew of mutton,  
which Cousin Egbert declared was "some  
goo". . . . (page 55)

"Hey, Frank," he began, and con-  
tinued with some French words, among  
which I caught "vooley-vous, ally caffy,  
foomer"; and something that sounded much  
like "kafoozleum", at which the cabb  
spoke at some length in his native lan-  
guage concerning the ostrich. (pages 67-  
68)

The following passage, taken from Ruggles of  
Red Cap, is by far the richest of all his references  
to the French language. It has a much deeper tone,  
and rings true to human nature. In it Wilson shows his  
true understanding of the human race, and the contempt  
or scorn which one nationality so often feels for the  
language of another. It is in cases of this sort that  
Wilson reveals his true self, and we realize his value  
as a student of human nature. In this passage, Ruggles  
is expressing his idea, as an Englishman, of the French  
language.

Even their language is not based  
on reason. I have had occasion, for  
example, to acquire their word for bread,  
which is "pain". As if that were not  
wild enough, they mispronounce it at-  
rociously. Yet for years these people  
have been separated from us only by a  
narrow strip of water! (page 8)

It is interesting to note that Ruggles comments on both spelling and pronunciation of the word. And even more interesting is the fact that he feels that of course his own ideas couldn't be queer, but the ideas and customs of anyone not English are inevitably odd. He shows this attitude often during the story.

Wilson has employed several methods in this chapter which are suggested in Bergson's Essay on Laughter. His two best characters, Professor Coplestone and Ruggles, illustrate these devices. In the following from Bergson, we are made to think of the admiration of these two characters for certain persons much below them in social standing.

To express in reputable language some disreputable idea, to take some scandalous situation, some low-class calling or disgraceful behaviour, and describe them in terms of the utmost "respectability", is generally comic. (pages 125-126)

Equally applicable to these two characters is the following passage from Bergson.

Certain professions have a technical vocabulary: what a wealth of laughable results have been obtained by transposing the ideas of everyday life into this professional jargon! Equally comic is the extension of business phraseology to the social relations of life. (page 128)

In Ruggles' repeated use of the two phrases, "it would never do with us", and "people that really

mattered", we see the comic effect to which Bergson refers in the following:

A comic meaning is invariably obtained when an absurd idea is fitted into a well-established phrase-form. (page 112)

One more passage from the same essay must be noted here, for it describes especially well the most striking humorous characteristic of Ruggles and Professor Coplestone.

A comic effect is obtained whenever we pretend to take literally an expression which was used figuratively. Once our attention is fixed on the material aspect of a metaphor the idea expressed becomes comic. (page 115)

Many more examples could have been given illustrating each type of humor mentioned in this chapter. But we can certainly see from those studied that verbal sources play a large part, if not the largest, in Wilson's humor.

## Chapter V

### A Study of Wilson's Technique

After a careful and fairly thorough study of Wilson's works, we are ready for a discussion of his general technique. In this chapter there will necessarily be some repetition of things mentioned earlier in the thesis, for it would be impossible to give a summary without referring to these again.

First, we shall attempt to answer a question which arises early in our minds during the study of any author. What are his chief characteristics as a writer? Many authors have only one feature for which they are especially well-known. But in Wilson's case we find several qualities which are strikingly characteristic, and which, by creating atmosphere, intensify his humor.

Wilson's descriptive power is outstanding. We have noticed earlier in this study both his descriptions of American scenes and those of characters. Not only are his scenes vividly painted, but their range is very wide. If we notice the contrast between the following scenes named, which, along with many others,

are vividly and well described, we have to acknowledge Wilson's mastery of description: the mountains of Montana and the Stock Exchange of New York; the baseball game and Breede's business office; Hollywood and the gypsy camp; the hospital scenes and ranch scenes; the copper mine and Miss Vrain's Boarding School.

The thing that makes his descriptions so good is Wilson's use of local color. His language is chosen to suit the type of scene he is describing, and little details are added which give exactly the desired atmosphere. A good example of this is found in the ranch terms used by Ben Carcross in Lone Tree, in The Lions of the Lord when the Mormons are on the march, and in scores of other places.

Wilson's character description is just as good as that of scenes, and is marked by as much variety as the other. His characters are drawn from all walks of life, and all ages. Miss Vrain, the stately boarding-house matron; Mrs. Gale, of the Free Auto Camp Grounds; the Hamburger Queen; the demon alumnus; the dignified Judge Penniman; Dave Cowan, the worthless philosophizer; Brigham Young, leader of the Mormons; Prudence Rae, the little Mormon girl; Professor Coplestone; the Cowan twins, Merle and Wilbur; Countess Casanova, the crystal-gazer; the Flapper; Peter Bines, the old prospector in Montana; Ruggles, the English

butler who comes to America; the Honourable George, who follows Ruggles to America; these, and hundreds of other characters are made to seem true and lifelike to us, simply because of Wilson's wonderful descriptive power. He not only gives good descriptions of the persons themselves, but he creates the atmosphere which makes them seem more real.

This brings us to another characteristic-- Wilson's ability to create such varied situations. We must not think that Wilson writes nothing but humor, for he has a serious vein as well. In The Lions of the Lord we find very pathetic scenes, and The Spenders, The Wrong Twin, and Cousin Jane all have quite a bit of seriousness. However, he is much more at home in the field of humor, and in the different humorous situations which he has created, we find great variety. Let us mention a few of these chosen at random, and notice how varied they are.

Among the children we have Bunker Bean trying to learn to smoke; Patricia Whipple attempting to kidnap a gypsy baby; the Whipple twins in the cemetery reading the epitaphs; and the Whipple twins cutting off and burying Patricia's braid of hair. A few other situations which illustrate Wilson's wide range of material, I shall barely mention, giving only a sentence or two to each.

Professor Copplestone and Sooner Jackson decide to put on a medicine show, and the Professor is disguised as an Indian, but speaks Latin, Greek, and Sanskrit. This of course betrays him. When Sharon Whipple's car stalls, he starts to suggest calling a veterinary, but catches himself in time. Then Wilbur tears the car apart and puts it together again, only to find that it needed gas. Another amusing car incident is the crashing of the bus into the Dodwell yard. Grandma Dodwell, who has not walked for twenty years, stalks out unsupported toward the offender. When Merton is trying to get some pictures which will help him into the movies, with much difficulty he finally mounts Dexter, the old delivery horse. But the second time he does it, Dexter, profiting from the last experience, rebels, and throws Merton. The preparations of the Whipple family for Church create an interesting and amusing situation. Wilson's description of this makes it seem very real. Ruggles is sent with Cousin Egbert to see that he is shaved and properly outfitted. The situation becomes very amusing because of Cousin Egbert's objection to anything stylish, and Ruggles' desire to be exceedingly proper. Ruggles describes an incident which contains much humor, as well as some pathos. He becomes very seasick, and feels that Cousin Egbert is going to let him die. At another time Ruggles attends

the Onwards and Upwards Club, supposed to read for its members from the English Lake poets. But the time is so filled with gossiping that he has no time to read. The Honourable George's arrival in America is one of the most humorous situations in the whole book. He has more than one person can possibly carry, and has to have the help of several people when he descends from the train. Miss Hicks, Rufus' nurse, tells of a terrible thing she did once when on a case. She let the air out of an air cushion, and later discovered that it had been filled with the breath of her patient's dead husband, so was considered very sacred.

These are only a very few of the amusing situations which Wilson has created, but they show us his wide range of material. In many cases it is the earnestness and innocence of the characters which greatly increases the humor.

If Wilson has one characteristic for which he is known above all others, it is his wealth and variety of vocabulary. In our chapter on the verbal sources of his humor, we were able to examine only a few of his richest examples of this. His use of slang, mispronunciation, odd coinages, and wrong use of terms because of a misfit in society are always refreshing,

because they are used in such a variety of ways, always giving us something new. We have noted his wide range of characters, and the different classes of society from which they are chosen. His vocabulary is always well-chosen, and exactly suited to the persons speaking, excepting when Wilson intends for them to be using terms not suited to them. Even in these cases, he has carefully chosen expressions which will give the most humorous effect.

From this observation we get another distinguishing trait of Wilson. He is a shrewd student of human nature. Variety of character, with vocabulary suited to each of his creations, could not come excepting through constant study and observation. He deals with the East and the West, with England and America. His characters are made to react to all kinds of situations, and they do it naturally. This is an art, and not an accident.

Wilson touches lightly upon the field of satire. A few scattered quotations will best illustrate this. First we find a touch of it in The Wrong Twin. The first two passages refer to Patricia Whipple, who has dressed herself like a boy and planned to run away, and to Wilbur Cowan, who has dressed in her clothes.

"The young person you indicate was about to leave her home forever--going out to live her own life away from these distasteful surroundings."

"So soon? We should be proud of her! At that tender age, going out to make a name for herself! . . ." (pages 33-34)

"It will surprise you to know," said Julianna in her best style, "that this young girl before you is not a girl."

Both Whipples ably professed amazement.

"Not a girl?" repeated the suave Whipple incredulously. "You do amaze me, Juliana! Not a girl, with those flower-like features, those starry eyes, that feminine allure? Preposterous! And yet, if he is not a girl he is, I take it, a boy." (page 34)

The two following passages are taken from The Wrong Twin, and are self-explanatory.

Still, the family was prosperous. For in addition to the pension, Mrs. Penniman kept a neat card in one of the front windows promising "Plain and Fancy Dressmaking Done Here", and Winona now taught school. . . . (page 62)

"Join the Army and See the World", urged the large-lettered legend above the picture.

The latter revealed an entrancing tropical scene with graceful palms adorning the marge of a pinkly sun-kissed sea. At a table in the background two officers consulted with a private above an important-looking map, while another pleased-looking private stood at attention nearby. At the left-foreground a rather obsequious-looking old colonel seemed to be entreating a couple of spruce young privates to drop

round for tea that afternoon and meet the ladies. (page 231)

In Merton of the Movies we note a eucalyptus tree in a New York scene. This is evidently a fling at the attempt to produce New York scenes in California. Young Merton, a movie fan, has decorated his den with pictures of his favorite star, and in these we are given some very vivid supposed American scenes.

The intrepid girl was seen leaping from the seat of her high-powered car to the cab of a passing locomotive, her chargrined pursuers in the distant background. She sprang from a high cliff into the chill waters of a storm-tossed sea. Bound to the back of a spirited horse, she was raced down the steep slope of a rocky ravine in the far West. Alone in a foul den of the underworld she held at bay a dozen villanious Asiatics. Down the fire escape of a great New York hotel she made a perilous way. From the shrouds of a tossing ship she was about to plunge to a watery release from the persecutor who was almost upon her. Upon the roof of the Fifth Avenue Mansion of her scoundrelly guardian of the great city of New York she was gaining the friendly projection of a cornice from which she could leap and again escape death--even a fate worse than death, for the girl was pursued from all sorts of base motives. This time, friendless and alone in profligate New York, she would leap from the cornice to the branches of the great eucalyptus tree that grew hard by. (page 22)

In The Boss of Little Arcady we find two examples of general satire on human nature. The second is self-explanatory. In the first, Wilson gives a good description of the discussion of the Study Club of Little Arcady. Many queer speeches are made by the women in

their efforts to seem thoroughly familiar with Shakespeare, and still not commit themselves.

The discussion that followed the paper-- as was customary at the meetings--proved to be a bit livelier. Each lady said something she had thought up to say, beginning, "Does it not seem--" or "Are we not forced to conclude-- . . ." (page 211)

There was a flavor of much-needed romance in this survival at our very doors of an ante-bellum unrighteousness. The town cherished a hope that Clem would try to run off some time, or that Miss Caroline would have his back cut to ribbons, or try to sell or mortgage him or something, thus creating entertainment of an agreeable and exciting character. (page 190)

After having noted Wilson's general characteristics as a writer, it will be of interest to see how many of them are common to all, or at least most, of his books used in this study. Nearly all that we have mentioned are found at least to some extent in every book, with possibly the exception of satire. The two most characteristic features marking every book of Wilson's that we have studied are his excellent character portrayal and his clever use of the language. It is these two which make his style strictly his own, and so extremely fascinating. Professor How Could You! is perhaps the richest of all in verbal humor, with Ruggles of Red Cap following a close second.

Another interesting feature to note is a striking similarity between certain characters, usually

in different books.

Rufus Billop, in Oh, Doctor! and Bunker Bean, when young, were both abnormally timid, and led much the same sort of reserved life at first. The nurses in Lone Tree and Miss Doyle in Oh, Doctor! have many of the same characteristics. However, they are not merely types, but are individual enough to seem real. Mr. Cleaver, Rufus Billop's tutor, and Dave Cowan, the father of the twins, both have the gift of philosophizing. They have their own original theories of life, of the development of the universe, and such things, and enjoy talking about them at great length. Rufus Billop and Judge Penniman have one quality in common. This is the idea that they are always ailing. Anyone who is familiar at all with the plot of Oh, Doctor! knows that it is built around the idea of Rufus that he is an incurable invalid, all but ready for the grave. The following description taken from The Wrong Twin, describing Judge Penniman, will show the similarity between these two characters.

A sufferer for years, debarred by obscure ailments from active participation in our industrial strife, the judge, often for days at a time, would not complain unless pressed to--quite as if he had forgotten his pains. The best doctors disagreed about his case, none of them able to say precisely what his maladies were. True, one city doctor, a visiting friend of the Penni-

mans' family physician, had once gone carefully over him, punching, prodding, listening, to announce that nothing ailed the invalid; which showed, as the judge had said to his face, that he was nothing but an impudent young squirt. He had never revealed this parody of a diagnosis to his anxious family, who always believed the city doctor had found something deadly that might at any time carry off the patient sufferer. (page 61)

We might continue to name pairs of characters who are similar, but one more pair will be enough to illustrate our point. Professor Coplestone and Ruggles are very similar in two respects. They both gain the same ridiculous effects with vocabulary, misunderstanding, and innocently using it in the wrong way. Then they both have the same strange infatuation with characters in a much lower class than their own.

Along with similarity of characters, we should notice a few examples of similarity of situation, sometimes in the same book, and sometimes in different ones.

In The Boss of Little Arcady we have a three-fold situation, as we might call it. First of all, Mrs. Potts comes to the quiet little village of Little Arcady, and makes many changes. Then Miss Caroline comes from the South to live with her old negro slave, Clem. And after readjustments have been made by her coming, Little Miss, her daughter, comes to make her home there. The whole story centers around these three main events.

In Ruggles of Red Gap much the same thing happens. Ruggles comes to America and makes his social entrance into Red Gap, and when the community has sufficiently recovered from that, the Honourable George comes over from England. Misunderstanding of one social class by another is a feature often used by Wilson. We find examples of this in The Spenders, The Lions of the Lord, and Ruggles of Red Gap. This misunderstanding in many cases causes similar situations to arise. Another situation which Wilson uses several times is the changing of a child from one home to another. We find this in the case of Bunker Bean, Rufus Billop in Oh, Doctor!, Cousin Jane, Merle Cowan in The Wrong Twin, and Prudence Rae in The Lions of the Lord. The rash spending of money newly acquired is a situation which arises in several cases. Bunker Bean, Professor Copplestone, and Wilbur Cowan are the main ones who do this.

It is impossible to make a thorough comparison here of the verbal usage in the various books. However, I shall touch upon a few of the main points. Figurative language, of course, is used freely in all of Wilson's books. Peculiar names for people, such as "the Merle twin", "the Montague girl", "the Flapper", and "the Mixer" are used in most of them. Slang is found in all to some degree, but the two books which feature it especially are Ruggles of Red Gap and Profes-

sor, How Could You!

By this comparison of Wilson's books, and the noting of marked similarities, we are made to feel that he has certain formulae for securing his humorous effects. The noting of these will require some apparent repetition, for I have used some of them in illustrating the similarity of situations. However, in cases where the repetition occurs, I shall merely mention it and pass on. By a formula of humor, I mean a device used again and again to produce the same humorous effect. It may be in the same book, or in different ones.

We think first of all of Wilson's use of slang. This in itself would not be especially outstanding, but the effect is gained by the way in which it is used. In the first place, Wilson must have made a thorough study of the slang used by different classes of people, for he makes it seem perfectly natural to each one using it. The humorous effect is gained from the slang by its transfer from one character to another. It is used in the natural way the first time, but the person picking it up uses it in an unnatural way, often giving an entirely new meaning to it, or leaving it with no possible meaning at all. This is used by Professor Coplestone much more than anyone else. How-

ever, we must not forget Ruggles in this connection. As an Englishman, he changes it in a little different way. Also, the Americans pick up English slang, and try to use it, often with a very humorous effect.

The formula most closely related to the one above is, perhaps, the use of mispronunciation, coinages, and wrong use of words. These three things are so closely connected that they can scarcely be separated. The mispronunciation is of both English and French, and is used in several books. These three wrong usages are usually caused by a misunderstanding, or a misfit in society. An illustration of this is Ruggles' continued use of the term "North America" when he is referring to the United States.

In connection with this is the next formula-- the repeated use of words and phrases, very ordinary in themselves, until they become humorous from overuse. Examples of this are Ruggles' "that would never do with us" and "I mean to say", and Sharon Whipple's "I ain't wanting that to get out on me".

Wilson gains a humorous effect by giving certain of his characters peculiar names, such as the Flapper, Sooner Jackson, the Merle twin, the Wilbur twin, the Montague girl, Grandma the Demon, Bunker Bean, Mr. Gashwiler, and the Hamburger Queen.

Very closely related to this is another humorous effect, gained by the striking titles which he gives to his books. Among the most attractive are The Wrong Twin, Bunker Bean, Merton of the Movies, Somewhere in Red Gap, Oh, Doctor!, and Professor How Could You!

Repetition of certain incidents in a little different way is a method of which Wilson makes much use. The coming of Ruggles to America is repeated later in the story by the coming and adjustment of the Honourable George. The rashness with which certain characters spend money newly acquired has already been mentioned. This is done by Bunker Bean, Wilbur Cowan, and Professor Coplestone. Bunker Bean makes repeated trips to the crystal-gazer to ask what his form was before reincarnation. Each time the answer is something different, but the general situation is much the same. Professor Coplestone's extreme infatuation for certain characters is repeated again and again. Among those whom he so deeply admires are Mrs. Gale, the Hamburger Queen, Vera of the Gus Reddick Show, and Harold the gambler.

In The Wrong Twin Wilson gains a humorous effect by constant reference to the ill-health and complaining of Judge Penniman. This is also used in

Oh, Doctor!, in the case of Rufus Billop. The humor in both instances lies in the fact that neither of these characters is really ill.

Another formula used by Wilson is the ridiculous ideas of certain characters concerning very common-place things. Examples of this are Wilbur's idea of the superiority of gypsies, Professor Coppelstone's confidence in Harold the gambler, Bunker Bean's utter faith in mediums and crystal-gazers, Wilbur's infatuation with the bleached blond, Pearl, at the dance, and Ruggles' queer ideas concerning America and her customs.

Closely linked with this is another formula-- a character's exaggerated innocence. It is this which makes some of these beliefs seem so genuine, and therefore so very humorous. Ruggles and Professor Coppelstone are the two characters who show this trait more than any others.

Another scheme of Wilson's is to make certain characters very philosophical. The two who do this the most are Dave Cowan in The Wrong Twin and Mr. Cleaver, Rufus' tutor in Oh, Doctor! Their philosophy, of course, is absolutely out of reason which makes it very humorous.

Two formulae which Wilson has chosen to use are so closely related that we must mention them to-

gether. I refer to a very abrupt change in the plot of a book, and a marked change in a character during the course of the story. Let us note first just a few changes in plot. Ruggles comes to America with a rebellious, critical attitude toward our customs, and the main interest of the plot at first seems to be to run down America. However, at the end of the story he has become a part of Red Gap, and is completely satisfied. The first part of Oh, Doctor! is built around the imagined illness of Rufus Billop, and the chief aim is to make him seem ill. But at the last, after his accident, when he was almost killed, forces are combined in a struggle for his recovery. In The Wrong Twin, we have at first Winona Penniman's very strenuous opposition to any prize-fighter, and later in the story her marriage to Spike Brennon, who is one.

For examples of a marked change in character, we have the following: Peter Bines, the old Montana prospector, who at first can see nothing but the West, finally goes East and likes it. Breede, the hard-headed employer of Bunker Bean, who seems absolutely heartless, finally relents and becomes really like a human being. Bunker Bean, who all his life has been so abnormally timid, at the last comes into his own, and finds his courage. Percival Bines, who in the first of the story is happy-go-lucky and a spend-thrift, becomes very sensible

at the last. Merle Whipple, who in the first of the story seems the better of the two twins, at the last becomes an anarchist, and is a great disappointment.

In the study of any author, it is interesting to note the chronological development and change, if any, in his works. In discussing this phase of Wilson's work, I can include, of course, only the books of which I have made a study. For the sake of convenience, I shall repeat here chronologically the list of books studied. The Spenders (1902); The Lions of the Lord (1903); The Boss of Little Arcady (1905); Bunker Bean (1912); The Man from Home (1915); Ruggles of Red Gap (1915); Somewhere in Red Gap (1916); The Wrong Twin (1921); Oh Doctor! (1923); Merton of the Movies (1925); Professor, How Could You! (1925); Cousin Jane (1926); Lone Tree (1929).

In the first three of these we find scattered bits of humor all the way through, but much seriousness, and even some sadness and pathos. An especially pathetic strain runs through The Lions of the Lord. In Bunker Bean there is a definitely humorous quality, with only a little pathos. Evidently during the seven years that passed after the writing of The Boss of Little Arcady Wilson must have undergone a change, for all of his books after that, with the exception of The Man from

Home, are much lighter and more humorous. In The Man from Home there is some choice humor, but not a great deal. Ruggles of Red Gap, which appeared the same year, is extremely humorous. The Wrong Twin, which appeared in 1921, although very humorous in parts, also has a serious vein. Merton of the Movies and Professor, How Could You! come next, bubbling over with fun. Then the next is Cousin Jane, containing humor, but of a much more serious nature. Lone Tree, written in 1929, is another of the more humorous group. In summing up the chronological development of Wilson's humor, I should say that the books written since 1915 are of a lighter vein than those before. The two outstanding examples of humor are Ruggles of Red Gap and Professor, How Could You!

In closing the study of Wilson and his works, I shall endeavor to determine whether he has given us any original creations. First of all, is there, in any of Wilson's works, any truly great situation which towers above the rest in importance and humor, such as Twain's Tom Sawyer whitewashing the fence? The incidents in Professor, How Could You! seem to stand out more effectively than any of his other stories. In this book, I can think of two, and possibly three, situations which seem to be original with Wilson, and

which are sufficiently effective, I believe, to live in literature. The first of these is the medicine show which is put on by Sooner Jackson and Professor Coplestone. In order to disguise the Professor, who has run away from home, Sooner paints him up to represent an Indian chief, and teaches him to say "Ugh, ugh! Me heap big chief!" The Professor part of the time speaks Latin and part of the time Greek. This all works very well at first, but the Caesar which he is quoting is recognized by a Latin student, and the deception is discovered. Another similar situation is presented when Professor Coplestone joins the Burke's Monster Grand Allied Street Carnival, in order to hide from the demon alumnus, who is trailing him. He is allowed to take the place of Moowoo, the Madagascar wild man, but here he is again trailed by the demon alumnus. The third situation, which is possibly not quite so obvious to the reader, is at the time when Professor Coplestone gives his identity as Addison Simms of Seattle. The newspaper reporter writes up a long article, making much of the fact that the widely-known Addison Simms of Seattle has been responsible for breaking up a home, and the injured husband has threatened a heart-balm suit. Professor Coplestone being totally ignorant of the fact that Addison Simms is a fictitious person, worries a

great deal for fear that the real Addison Simms will appear and make trouble for him.

Our next question is whether or not Wilson has created any great original character, one who makes us think instantly of Wilson as the author, just as Falstaff brings Shakespeare to our minds. Again we turn to Professor How Could You! for our example. Certainly Professor Coppelstone is the best known as well as the most interesting character created by Wilson. This is because of the hilariously funny situations in which he finds himself, made more humorous because of his utter faith in everyone, and his extreme innocence.

Another character almost as outstanding as Professor Coppelstone is Ruggles. We remember him most of all for his odd ideas concerning America and her customs, his misunderstanding of our language, and misinterpretation of remarks which he hears made by other people. He has the same quality of faith in everyone, and is entirely unaware of the humorous things which he says.

These two characters, then, we think of as belonging strictly to Wilson, for nowhere else in literature do we find any creation at all like them.

In this field Wilson invites comparison with

a master, for in some ways Oh, Doctor! is very similar to Molière's "Le Malade Imaginaire". Argan, in Molière's play, imagines that he has every sort of ailment, and is happy only when he is under the doctor's care. Rufus Billop, in Oh, Doctor!, is the same type of person. He has always imagined himself an invalid, and feels perfectly contented only when he has the careful attention of nurses and doctors. However, Wilson does not follow Molière's plan all the way through. At the close of the story, there is a shifting, and Rufus, who has been in a dreadful accident and is at the point of death, makes a desperate struggle to get entirely well. He succeeds, of course. There is not much similarity in the plots of the two books. Argan spends his time in trying to plan for his daughter to marry a doctor, but meets with difficulty, since she is secretly engaged to someone else. Rufus has no one else to plan for but himself, and his time is spent in trying to prove to his aunts and everyone else how very ill he is. The parallelism in the situation is mainly in the two great humorous characters created, and their general outlook upon life.

In The Boss of Little Arcady we see a similarity to Mark Twain's The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg. The situations are not so nearly parallel as the two cited above, but there are several similar conditions. In

Twain's story, the man went through Hadleyburg, was offended, and plotted his revenge on the whole community. It was through this revenge that the town received its downfall. In The Boss of Little Arcady, the town suffers because of a citizen, Mr. Potts, of whom they have been trying to rid themselves. He and his wife have separated, and finally, in order to force him to leave, they write for her to come. When she arrives, she begins her attempt to change the town, and before she stops she has almost ruined things. Her aim is to uplift and improve the town socially, but she does not succeed.

We have made a study of Wilson's various characteristics, and have also noted that in certain respects he may be compared with both Twain and Moliere. Surely an author who attains that height is worth the time we have spent.

Wilson is a master in description and character development, but the field of his greatest originality is that of verbal humor. In this he reigns supreme, for there is no one else with such power in this field.

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